



# **Theology in a Local Church: An Ordinary Ecclesiology**

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of  
the University of Chester  
for the degree of Doctor of Professional Studies in Practical Theology

by  
John Gregory Hoyland

January 2017

The material being presented for examination is my own work and has not been submitted for an award of this or another HEI except in minor particulars which are explicitly noted in the body of the thesis. Where research pertaining to the thesis was undertaken collaboratively, the nature and extent of my individual contribution has been made explicit.

## Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge those who have helped me along the way. Particular thanks go to:

- The congregation and clergy of St Mary's, Dunston<sup>1</sup> for their friendship, fellowship, teaching and good humour
- My fellow travellers on the DProf programme, Anna, Derrick, Graham, Margaret and Steve for so much – a very special group of friends
- Dr Wayne Morris, my principal supervisor, for his patience, wisdom, scholarship and support
- The DProf team at Chester for their vision, scholarship, encouragement and hard work
- My former colleagues at York St John University, not only in the Theology Department but those from other disciplines as well, who made learning interesting and stimulating
- Friends who have put up with my despair, frustration and absence when this has taken up all my time
- My family, much loved and appreciated, especially my grandchildren who do so much to keep things in perspective. They know what really matters

*Ring the bell that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There's a crack in everything  
That's where the light gets in*

(from *Anthem* by Leonard Cohen)

---

<sup>1</sup> The pseudonym is that used throughout the study to preserve their anonymity. I have thanked them personally.

## Contents

	Page
<b>Abstract</b>	iv
<b>Summary of portfolio</b>	v
<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>PART ONE: The research question and its context</b>	5
<b>1. Starting Points</b>	5
1.1. The Gap in knowledge and the research task	5
1.2. Origins	6
1.3. Autoethnography	7
<i>Excursus 1: A personal ecclesiology</i>	20
1.4. Literature: Key Voices	24
1.4.1. Challenging voices	25
1.4.2. Ecclesial voices 1: what is church?	29
1.4.3. Ecclesial voices 2: where is church?	37
1.4.4. Anglican voices	41
1.4.5. Ordinary voices	43
<i>Excursus 2: Formal ecclesiology</i>	50
<b>2. “Watching what the community does”<sup>2</sup>: Method and Methodology</b>	53
2.1. Methodological assumptions and analytical method	53
2.2. Overview of the research project and defence of methods used	54
2.3. Methods	59
2.3.1. Choosing an ecclesial community	59
2.3.2. Practicing church: ethnography	61
2.3.3. Talking about church: interviews and conversations	62
2.3.4. Talking about church: focus group	63
2.3.5. Writing about church: texts	64
<b>PART TWO: The research and its outcomes</b>	66
<b>3. “Finding the Church”<sup>3</sup>: Ordinary ecclesiologies</b>	66
3.1. Talking and doing church	66

---

<sup>2</sup> Williams, R. (2000) *On Christian Theology* Oxford: Blackwell pxii

<sup>3</sup> Hardy, D.W. (2001) *Finding the Church* London: SCM

3.2. Interpretive dualisms	67
3.2.1. Instrumental – ontological	67
3.2.2. Temporal – transcendent	74
3.2.3. Patron – subscriber	78
<i>Excursus 3: Ordinary ecclesiologies</i>	82
<b>4. Outcomes: Reflection and discussion</b>	86
4.1. “What on earth is church for?”	86
4.2. Re-thinking ordinary theology	87
4.3. Re-thinking local church	93
4.4. Doing theology in the local church	95
<b>5. Conclusion</b>	102
5.1. Conclusion	102
5.2. Reflections on the project	102
<b>Bibliography</b>	104

## Abstract

Contemporary studies in ecclesiology cover a range of issues and contexts. Studies in ordinary theology also deal with a diversity of doctrines. There is, however, no substantial study of ordinary ecclesiology, that is, the understanding of church by ordinary members individually and by local churches congregationally. My personal and professional context is that of an ordained Anglican. In the light of this the study addresses this gap in knowledge by exploring the ordinary ecclesiology of a Church of England congregation. It is an example of an ordinary ecclesiology contributing a thick description (Geertz 1973) of a particular congregation to studies of church. The focus on ecclesiology is driven by issues raised in the literature review which demonstrate that the mainstream denominations in Britain face particular challenges such as numerical and influential decline.

The study is based on a two year ethnographic study of a commuter village church in a united benefice of four churches. The ethnographic study, based on participation in and observation of the church on a weekly basis, includes interviews, conversations, a focus group and an examination of the written data generated in the church (web-site; publicity; church newsletters; magazines; documentation). This qualitative data is analysed using a form of interpretive dualism (Soja 1996) which emerged as an appropriate method during the research. Three binary pairings describing ways of thinking about church are used: *instrumental – ontological*; *temporal – transcendent*; *patron – subscriber*. The research demonstrates how this local church goes about theological thinking on the idea of church and reveals the content of that thinking.

The study concludes that ordinary theology is present in the local church but that it is largely unacknowledged as such and is mainly a personal or individual enterprise. The implications of this are discussed. That discussion concludes that ordinary theology needs to be seen as the task of the whole *λαός* of God rather than the task of the laity and that in order to do this the local church needs to be re-imagined as a theological community where theological thinking is encouraged and resourced. This discussion centres on the importance of ecclesiology as a key doctrine in the Church of England's contemporary context. The study therefore makes a contribution to knowledge by identifying and articulating what the ecclesiology of a local church looks like. It contributes to and challenges current practice by proposing rethinking the nature and purpose of the local church.

## Summary of portfolio

The five pieces in the portfolio chart the development of both my own thinking about church and the research project. The *Personal and Professional Review and Research Agreement* described how I came to the study through my professional practice as an Anglican priest. I explored my growing interest in the theology done by Christians with no theological training (ordinary theology). The particular focus of my thinking was ecclesiology. The *Literature Review* gave me the opportunity to explore both these ideas in greater depth. Writing on ecclesiology is extensive and my reading concentrated on three areas. First was church in a secular or post-secular context. This involved exploring how these terms are used and what various constituencies mean by them. The second was literature which looked at ecclesiology itself in the teaching of the churches. Included in this was a particular focus on Anglican ecclesiology. The third was ordinary theology. My reading in this area included an examination of similar developments in other disciplines where the 'lay' voice has received increased attention.

I used the *Publishable Article* to develop my thinking around how the 'lay' voice can be heard. I explored the idea of the personal narrative in autobiographies as both a research tool and a pastoral tool. I argued that such stories are a legitimate place to discover the theological thinking of the teller. In the light of that I argued that the church needs to be a safe space in which people could tell their story as a means of exploring or developing faith.

The *Reflection on Practice* developed from the publishable article and I used an autoethnographic personal critical incident approach to my own faith journey. This allowed me to do three things. First, I was able to reflect on my own understanding of church and my relationship with it. Second, and as a result of this, I was able to identify my own thoughts on ecclesiology which was important in recognising what preconceptions I brought to the research. Third I was able to experience the thinking and self-disclosure which goes into giving an account of belief and practice. This brought into focus what I would be asking of participants in the research project.

The *Research Proposal* identified the research question. In studies of ordinary theology the ecclesiology of church members in mainstream denominations was largely missing. I therefore proposed an ethnographic study based in a local Church of England congregation as the appropriate way to generate the qualitative data needed.

## Introduction

This is a study of ordinary ecclesiology in a Church of England congregation, a piece of practical theology which Ganzevoort defines as, “the hermeneutics of lived religion”<sup>4</sup>. The ecclesiology of regular members of mainstream congregations is under-represented in current research. The study therefore makes a contribution to knowledge by identifying and articulating what the ecclesiology of a local church looks like. It contributes to and challenges current practice by proposing rethinking the nature and purpose of both ordinary theology and the local church.

The study is divided into two parts. Part One describes the origins of the research question, located in my own personal and pastoral context and in the literature dealing with ecclesiology. I have been involved with the church all my life, during which time its fortunes, status and role have changed dramatically. To illustrate this and to draw out the key issues the contemporary church faces I begin with an autoethnography which is defended as a research tool in Chapter Two<sup>5</sup>. The autoethnography not only shows how the research question arises in my own life and experience: it also highlights some of the problems with the definition of ordinary theology which are discussed in Chapter Four.

My own experience led me to extensive reading on church. The literature which shapes the research question is drawn from five areas. Three key voices articulate the challenges faced by my own Anglican (Church of England) perspective. There follows literature which deals with ‘ecclesiology’ or ecclesial thinking, that is what church *is*<sup>6</sup> and then literature on church as a concrete, visible entity. As the literature survey shows there has been a notable shift in recent years for ecclesiology, “to be informed by the practices of the actual churches”<sup>7</sup>. Healy contends that,

In general ecclesiology in our period has become highly systematic and theoretical, focused more upon discerning the right things to think about the church rather than

---

<sup>4</sup> Ganzevoort, R.R. presidential address to the ninth conference, International Academy of Practical Theology Chicago (2009) [www.ia-pt.org](http://www.ia-pt.org)

<sup>5</sup> It is also discussed more fully in the Portfolio – see TH8003 *Publishable Article*

<sup>6</sup> See for example, Mannion, G. & Mudge, L.S. (Eds) (2008) *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church* Abingdon: Routledge

<sup>7</sup> Rogers, A. *Congregational Hermeneutics: Towards Virtuous Apprenticeship* in Astley, J. and Francis, L.J. (Eds) (2013) *Exploring Ordinary Theology* Farnham: Ashgate pp.117 - 126



oriented to the living, rather messy, confused and confusing body that church actually is.<sup>8</sup>

As this is a study in the ordinary ecclesiology of a Church of England congregation the literature review ends by looking at some of the writing on Anglican ecclesiology. The final review of literature is on ordinary theology. This looks at how ordinary theology is understood in the academy and how it has arisen as part of a wider phenomenon affecting other disciplines as well.

Part One then describes and defends the research method used. The research is an ethnographic study based in the Church of England congregation of which I am a member and the data was generated by interviews, observations and surveys of various forms of documentary material. The methodology and method are defended in Chapter Two.

Part Two of the study presents the data from the research and its interpretation. This includes a discussion central to the thesis of how the church does theology. David Clark's conviction that, "putting the laity as community builders at the heart of the church's mission is crucial for the transformation of church and world alike"<sup>9</sup> is a critical observation. He argues for two ideas: the church as a *learning* community and the church as a *diaconal* community. This study argues that the first is the more critical and makes the case for the idea that the church – the whole *λαός* of God – needs to engage with 'doing theology' more consciously and deliberately at a local level. I conclude that there is a pressing need for churches to be theological communities if church is to survive into the future *as church*. Becoming a theological community does not mean all church members should have degrees in theology. It means, rather, rescuing theology from the somewhat pejorative sense it has acquired and rehabilitating it (literally) as the practical, faithful task of giving "the reason for the hope that [Christians] have" (1 Peter 3:15 NIV). This is particularly important when it comes to the articulation and practice of church. In a world where Christianity and its socio-cultural setting are undergoing considerable changes the question of what it means to be church is of critical and prophetic importance. Creative and imaginative efforts to make the

---

<sup>8</sup> Healey, N. (2000) *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p3

<sup>9</sup> Clark, D.B., (2005) *Breaking the Mould of Christendom* Peterborough: Epworth Press p xix

church relevant, appealing or contemporary deal primarily with form. Though church must move with the times this is important to keep the question of what church *is* to the fore.

Though this is an academic study it is driven by a personal questioning. The poetry of RS Thomas – itself a source of considerable theological reflection – has for many years given voice to my own searching and pondering. He spent many hours in empty churches. He had many questions – more than he had answers, and more than enough to make him abandon the faith. But he chose not to. Against the spirit of the age he determined to wait.

Why, then, do I kneel still  
striking my prayers on a stone  
heart? Is it in hope one  
of them will ignite yet and throw  
on its illuminated walls the shadow  
of someone greater than I can understand? (from *The Empty Church*)

He concludes what is probably his best known poem, *Kneeling*, with the words, “The meaning is in the waiting”. Counter-intuitively and counter-culturally he resists the urge to frenetic activism and remains with the reflective challenge of waiting – in silence. I think there is a lesson in that for the contemporary church.

Often I try  
To analyse the quality  
Of its silences. Is this where God hides  
From my searching? I have stopped to listen,  
After the few people have gone,  
To the air recomposing itself  
For vigil. It has waited like this  
Since the stones grouped themselves about it.  
These are the hard ribs  
Of a body that our prayers have failed  
To animate. Shadows advance  
From their corners to take possession  
Of places the light held  
For an hour. The bats resume  
Their business. The uneasiness of the pews  
Ceases. There is no other sound  
In the darkness but the sound of a man  
Breathing, testing his faith

On emptiness, nailing his questions  
One by one to an untenanted cross.

*(In Church by R. S. Thomas)*

## PART ONE: The Research question and its context

### 1. Starting Points

#### 1.1. The Gap in knowledge and the research question

My personal journey of faith as a Christian and my professional experience as priest and teacher has led me to question the nature and purpose of church. That question was pushed further by pastoral interactions in the congregations I was charged with serving where I encountered a gap between “what I ought to believe” and “what I actually believe”. Though I pursued this around a number of doctrines it was church which seemed of critical importance. As a priest and pastor I had spent a lot of time persuading people to come, keep coming or return to church. It seems self-evident that that is what the clergy are expected to do. As my autoethnography shows, I began to question this expectation as my professional role developed. It was furthermore as much a question about my own beliefs as of those I served.

Two gaps became apparent when surveying the literature. First, though academic writing demonstrates a serious interest in the local church this tends to focus more on practice than on the beliefs. Those which exist are, as Avis points out, often addressed to specific constituencies and are not always theologically precise in what they are asking. The focus of their discussions is often sociological rather than theological<sup>10</sup>.

Second, ordinary theology, which has given voice to the thinking of ordinary church members, has tackled a number of doctrines such as worship (Stringer<sup>11</sup>), Christology (Christie<sup>12</sup>), hermeneutics (Village<sup>13</sup>) and pneumatology (Cartledge<sup>14</sup>). Studies of ecclesiology, however, are more limited. Those which exist relate to issues such as the

---

<sup>10</sup> Avis, P. (2003) (Ed) *Public Faith* London: SPCK p123ff

<sup>11</sup> Stringer, M.D. (1999) *ON the Perception of Worship* Birmingham: Birmingham University Press

<sup>12</sup> Christie, A. (2012) *Ordinary Christology: Who do you say I am? Answers from the pews* Farnham: Ashgate

<sup>13</sup> Village, A. (2007) *The Bible and Lay People: An Empirical Approach to Ordinary Hermeneutics* Aldershot: Ashgate

<sup>14</sup> Cartledge, M. (2010) *Testimony in the Spirit: Rescripting Ordinary Pentecostal Theology* Aldershot: Ashgate

ecclesiology of occasional church goers<sup>15</sup>. The ecclesiology of regular church goers (their practice and beliefs) in local congregations, and especially in mainstream churches, has received less attention.

Bringing these together I have identified that there is no substantial study of the ordinary ecclesiology of members of a mainstream denomination. I take ordinary ecclesiology to have two aspects which I go on to argue is particularly distinct in the case of ecclesiology. It is the ecclesiology of individual members of a local church. It is also the ecclesiology of a local church congregationally. The research question addresses this by investigating the ecclesiology of one Church of England congregation and asks what that ordinary ecclesiology church looks like. In the light of this it considers the importance of ecclesiology for the Church of England in its contemporary context and the role of the local church in doing theology.

## 1.2.Origins

The study originates first in my personal involvement with church which has shaped both my practice and my understanding of it. There is then my pastoral experience of working in the church as a priest which brought me into closer contact with other peoples' understanding and practice of church. In the course of this it raised for me questions about the nature and importance of church in Christian life. Finally there is my exploration of the extensive literature on ecclesiology, both as pastor and later, researcher. The first two are dealt with in an autoethnography. The choice of this as a research tool is defended in Chapter Two. Here, I simply note, as Ellis and Bochner argue it, "make[s] the researcher's own experience a topic of investigation in its own right"<sup>16</sup>, a form of writing which entails the practitioner, "performing narrative analysis pertaining to himself or herself as intimately related to a particular phenomenon".<sup>17</sup> In my case my autobiography illustrates the significant changes the church and society in Britain have undergone in the last fifty years. It

---

<sup>15</sup> E.g. Walker, D. How Far is it to Bethlehem : Exploring the Ordinary Theology of Occasional Churchgoers in in Astley, J. & Francis, L.J. (2013) *Exploring Ordinary Theology* Farnham: Ashgate pp.137-14

<sup>16</sup> Ellis, C. and Bochner, A.P. (2000) Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher As Subject in Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds.) *The Handbook of Qualitative Research (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)* Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage, pp. 733-768 p.733

<sup>17</sup> McIlveen, P. (2008) Autoethnography as a method for reflexive research and practice in vocational psychology. *Australian Journal of Career Development* 17(2) pp13-20

also allows me to make my own voice clear. I did not begin this study from a neutral position but came with a particular ecclesiological viewpoint.

### 1.3.Autoethnography

Callum Brown writes about the “demise of [Britain’s] core religious and moral identity”<sup>18</sup>.

[Really] quite suddenly in 1963, something very profound ruptured the character of the nation and its people, sending organised Christianity on a downward spiral to the margins of social significance.<sup>19</sup>

Brown’s “profound rupture” is evidenced by declining numbers at church on Sundays, fewer baptisms, weddings and ordinations and the weakening or disappearance of church organisations. The church’s role and significance in public life is much changed and ‘Christian’ or ‘Christianity’ each carries different weight or significance today. White does add a word of caution<sup>20</sup> however. It is he suggests, “a recurring vanity of every age to think it is suffering radically new experiences.” As a Church of England member I am particularly exercised by the fortunes of that denomination in the current British context. As an ordained clergyman I am pastorally concerned with the formation of faith and theological reflection in church members (and clergy). And as an academic I have become increasingly interested in ordinary theology.

The secularisation narrative is not an abstract phenomenon. It is a lived experience which impacts upon individuals and communities in concrete ways. My own life coincides with Brown’s time frame and church has figured in my story all my life. I have lived in and through this story of Christianity’s fortunes. Baptised in a Congregational Church I later attended a Methodist Sunday School before joining a Church of England Scout Group and becoming a confirmed member of that church. I underwent a major rethink about denomination in my student years and settled on Anglicanism, going on to be ordained in my late twenties. Over thirty years in Christian ministry has meant that issues around church – what it means, how it is practised, how it is faring – have been central. As it is largely my

---

<sup>18</sup> Brown, C. (2009) *The Death of Christian Britain* London: Routledge p1

<sup>19</sup> Brown, C. *ibid.* p1

<sup>20</sup> White, V. (2002) *Identity* London: SCM Press p3

own experience of church which has led to the research question of this study I therefore begin with my story.

The autoethnography which follows is arranged around three time periods: my early years, 1958 to 1978, slightly broader than Marwick's "long sixties"<sup>21</sup>, covering growing up to ordination; 1978 to 2000 covering my time in pastoral ministry as an ordained Anglican; 2000 to the present covering my career as a lecturer in theology and honorary curate in a local church.

The autoethnography is followed by the first excursus on my own ecclesiology. I come to this study with a 'strong' ecclesiology. My autoethnography demonstrates that I have come to understand both church and ecclesiology as important elements in my own understanding of what it is to be Christian. As a researcher therefore I could not be neutral concerning what I was examining: I come to the study with a particular agenda. It is important therefore to articulate that ecclesiology early on in the study.

#### *The Early Years 1958 – 1978: "Moving In"*

I was born in Sheffield in 1950. Both my parents had served in the armed forces during the war, my mother in the Royal Signals in Egypt and my father in the Royal Air Force in the UK. We lived in a small terraced two-up, two-down opposite the factory where my father worked. Judt (2007) argues that the decade or so after the Second World War should not be seen as,

the threshold of a new epoch but rather as an interim age: a post-war parenthesis, the unfinished business of a conflict that ended in 1945 but whose epilogue... lasted for another half century.<sup>22</sup>

It was a fragile period of transition as people tried to move on from half a century of major conflict. There was some optimism and aspiration, particularly in my home town where *Sheffield Replanned* was published by the city's Town Planning Office in 1945, with ambitious plans to transform the badly bombed city. 'Prefabs' hastily erected in the late 1940s to house those made homeless by the bombing were gradually replaced by new council estates. "Car parks" in town – which were in fact levelled sites of buildings destroyed

---

<sup>21</sup> Marwick, A. (1999 edition) *The Sixties* Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks. Marwick 'spreads' the sixties from 1958 to 1974

<sup>22</sup> Judt, T. (2007) *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* London: Pimlico p2

in the Blitz – became modern new stores and offices. I started school in a very modern, exciting new school building, the neighbouring parish church was replaced by one designed by Sir Basil Spence – a very striking, modern piece of architecture which spoke of a church still ‘alive’ and relevant. At home we got a television – and an ITV aerial so we could watch two channels. The Beatles arrived on the pop scene and humans arrived on the moon.

I am looking at a photograph of myself aged eight. Next to me is my older brother. We are both wearing Cub uniform and standing outside the back door of the council house in Sheffield. There are paradoxes in looking at old photographs: I am looking into the lens and through the lens; I am eight and I am 64; it is me – but it is me at a different time. I remember the day of the photograph well (it was a new camera!), pausing in the back yard on a Sunday morning before going off to church parade. I remember the smell of the woollen jumper and the roughness of the navy blue serge shorts. I remember the pride at the first badge sown on to my sleeve.

And I remember having to run an errand for the Cub leader when we got to church and going in by the tower door into an empty, still and gloomy church on my own. Something made me pause. I stood staring down the church to the altar and heard myself say out loud, “Why do we come here every week?” I didn’t wait for an answer: being eight there were more pressing things to get on with. I’m not sure at what level I understood the question, if at all, but it stayed with me, perhaps more as an event than a question something remembered somewhere just below the surface, something important but not pressing. Something to think about one day...

Church was part of my cultural landscape during my growing years. Both my parents had been Sunday School teachers and active in the Scout movement though by the time I was eight and had gained some independence they had drifted away from regular church going. Was their story evidence of secularization? I don’t know. My mother was a sporadic attender and my father returned to church after my mother’s death in 1988. Confirmed at 70 he became a very active member, a server, a PCC member, a regular worshipper and, over time, a close friend of the vicar. In my youth they encouraged my attending but we never spoke of faith or discussed religion. My father is an example of what has become much rarer today: that of the ‘returner’ to church. Today a significant number of at least



two generations in Britain have never belonged to the church so will be ‘new arrivals’ rather than ‘returners’ should they join.

Thinking back it is clear that I was moving into the church as many were moving out. I cannot remember when I became aware of this decline but it was certainly a very conscious issue for me by the time I became a student in 1969. I recall that during the decade from 1960 to 1970 two issues which arose in the church had a considerable impact on me. There was liturgical reform in the guise of the Series One, Two and Three experiments in more contemporary Anglican worship and there was the publication in 1963 of John Robinson’s *Honest to God* – the only instances I can recall where I was involved in any discussion of things theological or faith related. The juxtaposition of these is significant: they each reflect something of how the church was responding to the drift of people from its ranks.

The failed attempt to modernise the Church of England’s liturgy in 1928<sup>23</sup> had consigned worship to an archaic form which was at odds with the modernisation taking place all around. Whilst that liturgy could be defended on aesthetic and even theological grounds it could not be defended in terms of communicating to people of the late twentieth century. I remember witnessing sharp divides and heated argument in church discussions, adults getting angry, and I recall being profoundly moved by the departure in tears of two elderly members of the congregation (elderly to me – they were probably in their late 50s!) when it was decided to use the Series One service on a regular basis. Two forces struggled in me: I was a child of the sixties who thought change was good; and I had a deep sense that not *all* change was good and here was another example of uncertainty and destabilisation.

The debate about liturgy was to some degree cosmetic. Though many theological ideas were present in the discussions (is seventeenth century English’s “miserable sinners”<sup>24</sup> the most helpful way to think of the human condition in a world which understands psychology and psychiatry?) the questions were really about contemporary form and format. Modernism was about clarity of form, a directness stripped of elaboration. Worship should be contemporary, lively, direct, entertaining even. All the reforms were trying to do was

---

<sup>23</sup> Parliament’s rejection of the Church of England’s proposed reforms to the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* was resented by many in the church and stifled any further attempts at reform until the 1960s.

<sup>24</sup> From the Litany in *The Book of Common Prayer*.

update worship into modern English, just as was happening with translations of the Bible. But I experienced the publication of *Honest to God* as something altogether more unsettling.

In retrospect I realize the book was also something to do with form and format. It was about language and conceptual frameworks. But the response to it, perhaps more than the book itself, suggested it was proposing something altogether more radical. If liturgical reform was about applying cosmetics, this was about cosmetic surgery. In *Honest to God* Robinson perceived his task to be to counter what Vidler described as the, “suppression of real, deep thought and intellectual alertness and integrity in the church”<sup>25</sup>. It was the cover which had the initial impact on me. Lehmbruck’s *Seated Youth 1917*<sup>26</sup>

a nude young man seated alone in a closed, self-contained, reflective, and melancholic pose. All nonessential elements... eliminated,

suggested deep thought but even deeper anguish. Something profoundly disturbing was about to happen: one did not even have to open the book to know that it was going to be uncomfortable. By the time of its publication I was aware of the major strands in both theology and church traditions. I knew we at St. Mary’s were “middle of the road” and that the neighbouring church of St Catherine’s at Richmond was “high”. I even knew that the “middle of the road” churchmanship of St. Mary’s was largely a compromise between a rector who would have preferred to be “high” and a PCC dominated by those who wanted to be “low”. I knew that Billy Graham preached an evangelical brand of Christianity which my RE teacher – a committed liberal – found totally unacceptable. I knew that *Honest to God* was anathema to the one and nectar to the other.

The 20 years from 1958 to 1978 are critical in the development of secularisation narratives. At the mid-point of this era a US space craft left earth’s orbit and circled the moon. Only seven years earlier in 1961 the Soviet cosmonaut Gagarin was the first human to go into outer space. He was widely reported as saying, “I don’t see any God up here”<sup>27</sup>: the crew of Apollo 8 read from Genesis. But this was not an example of the triumph of (American) Christian faith over (Soviet) atheism. If anything the moon orbit and subsequent

---

<sup>25</sup> See Robinson, J. (1963) *Honest to God* London: SCM p9

<sup>26</sup> US National Gallery of Art <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.54383.html> viewed 19.11.14

<sup>27</sup> Gagarin himself claimed he never said this and it is more generally thought to have been a comment by Khrushchev in a speech to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party

landing was an example of the onward march of science and of increasing secular confidence. My recollection is that religion was not declining because science had disproved God, just that people were paying less and less attention to God. Secularisation it seemed to me at the time was more about neglect than rejection.

So what was church and where did it fit in? Personally I think I went to church because in my family it was a valued, acceptable social activity providing a range of opportunities for a young lad growing up in the late 50s/early 60s. Money was not plentiful and the church provided most of these opportunities for free. It was respectable and – to some degree – aspirational. In the working class area of Sheffield where I grew up ‘chapel’ was generally for the factory workers (my father’s background), ‘church’ for the blue and white collar workers (my mother’s background) so going to *church* had an air of ‘improvement’ about it. It was part duty, part social and part refuge. It was part duty because my parents instilled in me a strong sense of obligation: if you join you go. It was part social – quite a large part – because it provided activities and enjoyment with a friendship circle of my own age. It was part refuge because school was an increasing trial in my early teenage years. I had enjoyed and succeeded at primary school and passed the eleven plus. At grammar school I sank to the bottom. Church and scouts were places where I still ‘succeeded’, where I wasn’t a disappointment or failure, so they took up more of my time and energy.

Here is the first glimmer of my own ecclesiology. My understanding of church was explicitly and implicitly functional. The awareness that ‘going to church’ involved belief or faith evolved gradually. The eight-year old me asking a profound question developed only gradually with no Damascus Roads, no *tolle, lege*, no ‘strange warming of the heart’. Although the church was well attended, including a significant number of youngsters of my own age the majority of my school contemporaries were not church goers but being a church member was still not that unusual. It had a slightly quixotic, mysterious air about it and membership was viewed with a generally supportive curiosity rather than dismissed as odd. It did have its advantages though. It gave me an edge at school where Religious Studies (Religious Knowledge and entirely Christian in those days) along with daily Christian assemblies were still a major feature of the school day.

By the time I became an undergraduate in 1969 I was describing myself as “a Christian”. Such an articulation is indicative of the fact that it was by then becoming more the exception rather than the rule. I was a regular church goer and an Anglican. I had attended an Anglican church now for some ten years but I tried out a Methodist Church and then a Baptist Church for a while before concluding that there was something about Anglicanism which I preferred. I read Ramsey’s *God, Christ and the World*<sup>28</sup> and his *Sacred and Secular*<sup>29</sup> during my first undergraduate year and found the spirituality (though I don’t think I would have used that term then) attractive.

### *The Middle Years 1978 – 2000: “Professional Christian”*

My early years ended with the process of selection for ordination which culminated in Bradford Cathedral in July 1978. It was not an easy journey. In terms of occupation I was now ‘a clerk in holy orders’. It might be a vocation to ministry in the church but it was invariably seen, by church members as much as those outside the church, as something you were paid for and therefore in some ways a profession. Professionalism is about competencies and attitudes<sup>30</sup>. It is about specialist knowledge, skills and expertise, being committed, confident, responsible and trustworthy. But how does this relate to ordination – the rather odd notion of being thought of as a professional *Christian*?<sup>31</sup> I had changed occupation and become a ‘professional’ at a time when, according to Towler and Coxon in the fly-leaf of their book, the clergy were “a shrinking body of men (*sic*) who serve a declining church.”<sup>32</sup>

Richard Holloway in his memoir<sup>33</sup> talks about his personal ambivalence towards being ordained: “it made me prey to [people’s] expectations about what the role involved.”<sup>34</sup> He goes on,

---

<sup>28</sup> Ramsey, A.M. (1969) *God, Christ and the World* London: SCM

<sup>29</sup> Ramsey, A.M. (1965) *Sacred and Secular* London: Longman’s, Green and Co Ltd

<sup>30</sup> See for example Brock, A. *Dimensions of early years professionalism - attitudes versus competences?* <http://www.tactyc.org.uk/pdfs/Reflection-brock>.

<sup>31</sup> There is, of course, the irony that *profession* was originally (prior to 1500 according to the OED) used of the vows made by one entering a religious order. Even more ironic is that it is now used almost as the opposite of *amateur* – once the one passionate about something, now just a dabbler!

<sup>32</sup> Towler, R. & Coxon, A.P.M. (1979) *The Fate of the Anglican Clergy* London: The Macmillan Press

<sup>33</sup> Holloway R (2012) *Leaving Alexandria: A Memoir of Faith and Doubt* Edinburgh: Canongate

<sup>34</sup> Holloway R (2012) *Ibid* p149

The ordained state seemed to represent for others two forms of certainty I did not possess. Moral certainty... [and] theological expectations... The inner disconnect between the Church's official theology and my own version of Christianity was one I did not comprehend at first"<sup>35</sup>

Those two gaps, the 'inner disconnect' and 'moral certainty' ("being thought of as a moral policeman keeping an eye on humanity's Ps and Qs"<sup>36</sup>) I found to be uncomfortable. David Jenkins, Bishop of Durham 1984 – 1994, confessed in his controversial enthronement service in Durham Cathedral,

I face you... as an ambiguous, compromised and questioning person entering upon an ambiguous office in an uncertain church in the midst of a threatened and threatening world.<sup>37</sup>

I hadn't become a bishop but his words resonate with how I saw the world, the church and myself as I embarked on life as a clergyman.

Many of the professional skills and competencies of a vicar seemed to be around running a sort of 'religious' club. They were focused on the institutional life of the church. A 'good' vicar was busy visiting, performing, recruiting, and leading a 'successful' church. And the church where I served my title was relatively successful if numbers and activities were anything to go by. Morning congregations exceeded 200 and evening congregations were regularly over 100. We ran three Sunday Schools in different parts of the parish, a church youth group of over 40 and an "open" youth group which exceeded 50 on most Friday evenings. The occasional offices took up a significant proportion of the clergy's time and the church was a major player in civic events. Church was still being accessed by significant numbers, and awareness of it by the general populace was relatively widespread.

In May 1979, a month before my ordination as a priest, Margaret Thatcher became Britain's first female Prime Minister.

The twenty or so years from 1978 to 2000 were marked by profound domestic and international events which in turn impacted on the church and its role in national and international politics. The inner city riots of Brixton, Handsworth, Chapeltown and Toxteth in 1981 (some repeated in 1985), the Falklands War of 1982, the Miners' Strike of 1984 –

---

<sup>35</sup> Holloway R (2012) *Ibid* pp150-151

<sup>36</sup> Holloway R (2012) *Ibid* p150

<sup>37</sup> Jenkins, D. (2002) *The Calling of Cuckoo* London: Continuum p109

1985 and the First Gulf War 1990 – 1991 illustrate Jenkins' "threatened and threatening world" for Britain and his "uncertain church" was deeply involved in all of them. The Labour Party during the 1980s was experiencing the so-called "wilderness years"<sup>38</sup> and the Church of England to some degree acted as the Opposition. It produced the *Faith in the City*<sup>39</sup> report as a response to social and political unrest with recommendations for church and government. Its challenge was,

to give every possible encouragement to those who are working out their own 'model' or 'theology' in the particular circumstances of their own ministry and vocation.<sup>40</sup>

And sermons were news! Runcie's sermon at the thanksgiving service to mark the end of the Falkland's War and Jenkins' enthronement sermon where he spoke openly about the Miners' Strike received wide press coverage.

One last incident took place in this period which is telling. On September 23<sup>rd</sup> 1987 an interview with Margaret Thatcher appeared in *Woman's Own Magazine* in which she stated, "there's no such thing as society." It is rightly pointed out that she went on to say that the government can do nothing except through people, and people cannot abdicate the responsibility for their well-being to the government. But significantly it was the short phrase of six words which captured the headlines and entered public discourse. Was it just clumsily expressed or was there something more critical being alluded to? It is arguable that there was indeed a shift taking place in how people were relating to society – and indeed, what society actually meant.

In terms of my own story of church a major change came for me in 1987 when I was appointed chaplain in an HE university college which led to two notable but related shifts in my understanding of church. One was the result of an experience whilst I was studying for an Advanced Diploma in Counselling. Each Thursday of the course ended with an 'experiential group meeting'. This was an 'off the record' activity which provided an

---

<sup>38</sup> Some sources suggest membership of the Labour Party fell from some 750 000 in 1978 to around 250 000 in 1984, e.g. Keen, R. *Membership of UK Political Parties* House of Commons Library Standard Note: SN/SG/5125 24.09.2014, though the quality of the reporting of party numbers has generally been controversial.

<sup>39</sup> Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas (1985) *Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation* London: Church House Publishing

<sup>40</sup> The Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas (1985) *op.cit.* 3.44

opportunity for course members to say how they were feeling about the course, life, their work or whatever. Thursday evenings was also the night I attended a church fellowship group. It occurred to me one Thursday that I was being much more honest and open in the 'secular' (sometimes quite hostile to Christianity) counselling group than I was in the church group. Why? It had something to do with the personalities involved but more to do with a continued belief that, in the church, I had to 'get it right' – and be seen to get it right.

The second relates to the pastoral work with which I was involved. I was hearing more and more about what Holloway would later refer to as the "inner disconnect" between the Church's official theology and people's own version of Christianity. At the time I coined the phrase "party lines and private faiths" to refer to this and it marks the beginning of the long journey to this thesis. Chaplaincy involves the paradox of being relatively high profile and close to the centre of an institution while at the same time being on the periphery. As chaplain I was on the edge of both the university and the church but I was neither "mainstream" academic or management nor "mainstream" church. I was therefore sufficiently "authoritative" to be worth talking to and sufficiently "marginal" to be safe to talk to. A significant number of conversations, particularly with staff over the years, contained phrases like "I am churchwarden in my church but have never understood why (some aspect of Christian practice)" or, "I have been a Christian for years now but never dared tell the vicar that I don't believe (some aspect of Christian faith)". Hearing of these gaps made me aware of my own and of my need to both acknowledge and explore them. I started the journey towards practical theology.

Events on the global stage impacted on the church in many ways. In 1978 Rome elected its first non-Italian pope since the sixteenth century and the Berlin Wall came down in 1989. From 1982 to 1992 there was the Lebanon hostage crisis in which the Archbishop of Canterbury's Special Envoy, Terry Waite became involved, first as a negotiator and then as a hostage himself. One of the hostages, Brian Keenan, wrote of his experience in a book which had a profound effect on me<sup>41</sup> and to which I refer below. Around 1986 the Soviet Union began a process of liberalisation leading to its final demise in 1991 and the re-drawing of the map of Eastern Europe. There was Band Aid in 1984, the Hillsborough Disaster in 1989 and in 1990 the First Gulf War. Towards the end of this period Diana, Princess of Wales died in a

---

<sup>41</sup> Keenan, B. (1992) *An Evil Cradling* London: Vintage

car crash (1997). The resultant outpouring of grief by huge numbers of the British population continues to be a topic of debate by sociologists, psychologists and politicians. It is also triggered considerable (on-going) discussion about developing notions of spirituality which were emerging during this period.

The Church of England also created its own news. The *Crockford's*<sup>42</sup> Preface written by Gareth Bennett in 1987 criticised the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, accusing them of incompetence and nepotism. It argued that Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics were being side-lined with senior posts going predominantly to Liberals and that the Anglican Communion had lost its common liturgical base in the Book of Common Prayer thus weakening the bonds which held it together. The first women deacons were ordained in 1987 and the first women priests in 1994. The church was rarely out of the media spot light. Here was another odd 'disconnect'. On the one hand the church was 'meddling in politics', operating on the national and international stage: on the other, its internal politics seemed trivial, out-dated, irrelevant, even embarrassing.

If the church in my early years had been part of my cultural background it was now central to my life. I had moved "in" during those early years: I was now a thorough-going insider. As such I felt a tremendous loyalty to the church. I worked hard to promote its positive values. That loyalty meant I often resisted criticisms of the church and interpreted its decline (as many did) as simply numerical. I either did not notice – or did not choose to notice – the slide towards marginalisation in the early years of my clerical career.

#### *2000 to the Present: "On the Margins"*

2000 saw my move from chaplaincy to a university lectureship in theology. The opportunity to teach theology brought with it the question of my ordination. Was this now reversing the decision of 1978 when I changed professions? In what way(s) would ordination still be relevant? Of the 25 from my theological college who were ordained in the same year as me I knew of eight others apart from myself who were no longer in occupations which required them to be ordained. Like me they had in one way or another stepped aside from their ordination. Was I but one more example of a generation of clergy striving to find some relevance in their working life having failed to find it satisfactorily in the church itself?

---

<sup>42</sup> Crockford's *Clerical Directory*(1987) London: Church House Publishing



Though some may have left the Christian faith altogether and some have left for personal reasons some have deliberately chosen to move to the margins to find a place of more effective ministry. W.H.Vanstone<sup>43</sup> reflected on his experience being brought up as a child of the vicarage in a 1930s northern urban parish compared with his experience as an incumbent in a similar parish in the 1960s.

Kindness such as my father had taught and practised was still possible, still useful and still appreciated. But it seemed less necessary: and one foresaw that, as the welfare state developed, it might scarcely be even possible.<sup>44</sup>

Was church for me and others like me becoming “less necessary”?

This needs to be set in a wider context however. Vanstone points out<sup>45</sup> that this sense that the church might be unnecessary could equally be applied to many other institutions. It was not only the church which seemed to be becoming less necessary – or at least less used – other institutions and organisations were losing members as well. Putnam’s *Bowling Alone*<sup>46</sup> argued that something similar to Brown’s “very profound rupture”<sup>47</sup> in the character of Britain and its people was happening to America’s civic life and institutions. At the start of the new millennium institutions which in the mid twentieth century had seemed healthy and permanent faced declining membership or closure by 2000. Political parties and trades unions saw numbers fall off and organisations such as old school associations or civic societies disappeared. Engagement was still happening but it was changing.

Having ceased to be a chaplain for the first time in my life I did not need to go to church on Sunday, to write sermons, choose hymns, plan events or make pastoral visits. For the time being I did not automatically belong to a church. Not only that: I had the freedom to decide if and where I would belong. I took the decision not to go anywhere for a while other than covering absences around the diocese on occasions when the need arose. Not going to church took me back to my eight year old self standing at the back of St. Mary’s Church, Handsworth. Why did I go to church? Why did anybody go to church? Why had I spent the last 22 years persuading people to start or continue going to church? I was aware of

---

Todd <sup>43</sup> Vanstone, W.H. (1977) *Love’s Endeavour Love’s Expense* London: Darton, Longman and

<sup>44</sup> Vanstone, W.H. (1977) *ibid.* p7

<sup>45</sup> Vanstone, W.H. (1977) *ibid.* p7

<sup>46</sup> Putnam, R.D. (2000) *Bowling Alone* New York: Simon & Shuster

<sup>47</sup> Brown, C. (2009) *op.cit.* p1

enjoying a sense of freedom (interesting that that is how I thought of it) and at the same time missing it. But of what was I free, and what did I miss? I was obviously free of the activity which had accompanied church. I was free of responsibility and I was free of having to perform. But more than the freedom *from* I experienced a profound sense of freedom *for*. What I had stumbled across was the freedom of the margins. Here on the edge of the church where I no longer felt any obligation to toe a party line I could somehow see more clearly. It was a heady feeling.

What I missed was complex and is linked to the idea of freedom. After his release as a hostage in Beirut in 1990 Brian Keenan wrote *An Evil Cradling*<sup>48</sup>. He describes how, after his release and being debriefed by Syrian security forces, he asked if he might go for a walk in Damascus. It was considered too dangerous so a compromise was reached.

That night I was driven around the city of Damascus with two armed plainclothes security men on each side of me. Freedom comes slowly at first.<sup>49</sup>

There is no way I want to compare church going with being a hostage! But Keenan's final sentence is profound. Freedom is often not what one expected. I missed the *habit* of church – the habit of *going* to church. I missed the regular attendance at services which, through the liturgical calendar, had given my life a shape, a rhythm, a structure. I had a sense of place – an identity – which was geographical, temporal, social and spiritual. It was *belonging* which I missed but not belonging to a particular church.

Vanstone's observation that the church no longer appeared necessary was followed by what he described as a "conversion experience"<sup>50</sup>. He realized that the church was in fact *more* necessary than ever in the growing affluence of his parish. I felt something similar. Critics may argue it is some kind of rationalisation but the secularisation process, the marginalising of the church, the Christian illiteracy of the latter half of the twentieth century seemed to me to have put the church in a place where it needed to (had to) fundamentally rethink what it was and what it was for. I became increasingly concerned that 'new ways of doing church' were in fact little more than window dressing and that something much more significant was needed. My view from the margins suggests the church is surrendering

---

<sup>48</sup> Keenan, B. (1994) *op. cit.*

<sup>49</sup> Keenan, B. (1994) *op. cit.* p296

<sup>50</sup> Vanstone, W.H. (1977) *op. cit.* pp15-16

tradition – a proper understanding of tradition – for what is fashionable. And fashion is, by definition, transient. To parody Eliot’s words, “Where is the tradition we have traded for relevance and where is the relevance we have traded for fashion?”

### *Excursus 1: A personal ecclesiology*

My autoethnography charts the development of the personal ecclesiology with which I began this study. To summarize it I use Cameron’s<sup>51</sup> model of theology in four voices but adapt it to three voices for this summary. I take the operant and espoused voices together to describe ordinary theology. The normative voice I take as the voice of the denomination or tradition I increasingly inhabited and the voice of the formal voice as that of the academy or professional theology. There is some overlap in the latter two but I encountered the first of them before I was exposed to the second.

The dominant voice in the early years is that which comes from personal attempts to make sense of belief, informed by significant individuals and societies. If religious faith is about believing, behaving and belonging (not necessarily in that order) then Fowler’s<sup>52</sup> first three stages of faith accounts for much of my thinking. In his model ‘institutions’ – the family, the school, the church – are the primary drivers of socialisation and religious faith. These certainly shaped my religious practice and I presume my beliefs as well but I cannot recall a conscious awareness of the latter. There was, looking back, a degree of “supposing” in my beliefs – *I suppose I believe in God; I suppose I believe the stories in the bible*. (I was curious about things other than God!) Fowler’s approach has been criticised in recent years as being too prescriptive<sup>53</sup>. It is now seen as paying too much attention to the cognitive aspects of faith at the expense of the experiential and as being too ‘male’ in its orientation and approach. Certainly I am more aware looking back of *practice* rather than thought and of church as an experience rather than an idea but there remains something of value in Fowler’s schema. von Hügel’s<sup>54</sup> earlier and simpler three elements developmental paradigm

---

<sup>51</sup> Cameron, H., Bhatti, D., Duce, C., Sweeney, J. and Watkins, C. (2010) *Talking About God* London: SCM

<sup>52</sup> Fowler, J.W. (1981) *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* New York: HarperCollins

<sup>53</sup> See for example Piper, E. *Faith Development: A Critique of Fowler’s Model and a Proposed Alternative* in *The Journal of Liberal Religion* Vol. 3 No 1 Winter 2002 pp1-16

<sup>54</sup> von Hügel, F (1908, revised 1923). *The Mystical Element of Religion: as studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and her friends*, 2 vols,

(the historical-institutional, the scientific-intellectual and the mystical-experiential) has a more elegant simplicity. The early years are characterised by finding one's place in the world; the adolescent years push the boundaries and begin exploring the world and ideas beyond; the latter years are inspired by the awesome wonder of it all, and a realisation that there are more questions than answers.

Those formative years led to my move, accidentally at first then more deliberately, into the Church of England. In my middle years I became more conscious of and drawn to the normative voice. There was an increasing awareness of heritage or tradition in my thinking against the backdrop of the 60s. Looking back I detect a realisation that the new, often outrageous thinking of the 60s was 'throwing the baby away with the bathwater'. Tradition and institution mattered to me but it felt like swimming against the tide. During this period I became more consciously Anglican, frustrated sometimes by the Church of England but drawn to a spirituality and ecclesiology which I found persuasive and fulfilling.

That normative voice was increasingly informed by the formal voice as I began the journey towards ordination. I encountered a variety of theological voices in what I read and in conversation. Life on the margins (as I describe the latter years) was – and still is – characterized by dialogue with many, not only from different ecclesiological positions but from other religious or secular faith perspectives as well. Moving into researching ecclesiology has inevitably led to a more focused concentration on reading this formal voice.

It would be possible – but wrong – to see these stages as neat and discreet. Clearly there is (and was) overlap. One of the attractions of von Hügel's model is that he allows for movement backwards and forwards. It is not a linear development. Whilst we may need to separate the voices out and can perhaps detect times when one or another of them dominated, we must not lose sight of the heuristic nature of life. These voices combine in a *Gestalt* like manner so that the whole is greater than the sum of all the parts. But concentrating on them individually allows us first to see what contribution each makes and second to ask if there is any imbalance or absence which is worthy of note.

So what does my story tell me about my ecclesiology, the understanding of church with which I start this study? The church's place in society has changed considerably over the course of this narrative. As an agent in the *Missio Dei* its manifestations have multiplied and

its role has evolved in response to changed circumstances. These however are changes of form rather than essence. What the church *is* remains the same.

I would describe my early understanding of church as ‘strong’ rather than ‘high’. That is, I had a strong conviction that church was necessary, even vital, but I did not have a high view of church in a Tractarian sense. I saw church as an expression of some kind of Christian solidarity, so its local, national and international dimensions mattered. I was driven by a strong belief in church unity and looking back can see that I often valued that above the party loyalties and divisions of traditions and denominations. I relied on church as an external regulator and source of sustenance for my personal faith. When I look at this understanding of church I could say pretty much the same about the political party I belonged to. The church was simply a religious version of my secular belonging. My eight year old self’s question resurfaced many times. Each time it did it added one more ingredient to a paradigm shift in my view of church. A paradigm shift is a fundamental change of mind. It means to look at the same thing – exactly the same thing – but to see it or understand it in a completely different way<sup>55</sup>. On the surface my new ecclesiology was much the same as my view of church. It was still ‘strong’ rather than ‘high’. I still saw it as an expression of some kind of Christian solidarity, and its local, national and international dimensions still mattered. Church unity remained high on my agenda and I continued to rely on church as an external regulator and source of sustenance for my personal faith. But these things mattered for wholly different reasons. They were not there in order to sustain the church as an institution. They are there because in different ways they each represented the essence of what church *is*. The paradox is that the most significant shift in my ecclesiology developed as I moved to the margins – as I stepped aside from the collective, communal aspect of church and began to see church more clearly. The view from the margins clarified a vision of what church should be.

Three key aspects define my current ecclesiology. It is fundamentally a theological rather than a sociological phenomenon. It responds to the God-given human need for community. In this sense it is counter-cultural in that it does not simply represent a religious form of

---

<sup>55</sup> Optical illusions such as Rubin’s Vase, an ambiguous or bi-stable image, illustrate this. Though nothing is added or taken away exactly the same image is interpreted by the brain in radically different ways.

community but exists as a prophetic community authenticating and incarnating the gospel. To describe it as “the Body of Christ” (1 Cor.12: 27) is to call attention to that theological, ontological reality which underpins its functional or instrumental necessity. Williams (2004) writes of an understanding which is, “essentially a vision of the Church as ‘epiphany’”<sup>56</sup>, an idea borrowed from the Orthodox tradition. He later quotes Michael Ramsey’s evocative challenge to see the church as “the glow of Christ’s incarnate presence”<sup>57</sup>. Authentic Christianity is congregational and *ἐκκλησία* embraces otherness and is the inevitable and necessary outworking of personal faith.

Secondly, the primary task of the church is to be a worshipping community. The focus of that worship is obviously God, but also – less obviously – God’s creation which includes humanity. To worship is to show honour and respect. The biblical notion goes far beyond what happens ‘in church’ (or Temple). It is about affirmation, relationality and value. In this sense church as a community is the place where human being is fully formed in its relationship to God, each other and self.

One key word is included in each of the above: that church is a community. Whilst I am absolutely persuaded that faith is personal and cannot in any sense be vicarious, it is not and cannot be individualized or private.

The last thing to say about my ecclesiology is that it is Anglican. The Church of England as an expression of Anglicanism means I am often faced with frustration with the former and an enthusiasm for the latter! I became an Anglican accidentally (by joining a church Scout group) but stayed deliberately after a period of searching and wondering during my student years. The paradigm shift in my understanding of church came later than my decision to be an Anglican, though that early choice could perhaps be seen as hinting at what would come later. My change of mind was based to a large extent on coming to a deeper understanding of what Anglicanism was. It therefore represents what Caroline Chartres (2006) refers to as a conversion within. Like her, I came to value,

---

<sup>56</sup> Williams, R. (2004) *Religious Identities* London: Darton, Longman and Todd p91

<sup>57</sup> Williams, R. (2004) *ibid* p91

the breadth and the trust of a church that gives me the freedom, within a framework, to make my own judgements; that says that all are welcome to share in its hospitality.<sup>58</sup>

A more detailed examination of some of the key writing on Anglican ecclesiology follows in the next section but key to Anglicanism is the idea that Hooker, Jewell and others were trying to define an ecclesiality which embraced diversity in unity.

#### 1.4.Literature: Key Voices

The starting point for Christian theology varies from theologian to theologian: with the Resurrection (Michael Ramsay); with Christology (Karl Barth); with God (Thomas F Torrance). Stanley Hauerwas asserts that, “all theology must begin and end with ecclesiology”<sup>59</sup>. Whatever the starting point ecclesiology has long been a major subject in theological discourse, from Augustine’s *City of God* where he argues for one church in two realities (the visible and the invisible) to Luther’s *Smalcald Articles* where he states the church is the community of those saved by Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, to writers in the modern era<sup>60</sup>. It has attracted attention as a theological subject (Dulles<sup>61</sup>; Zizioulas<sup>62</sup>), as a political body (Boff<sup>63</sup>; Moltmann<sup>64</sup>) or, in the tradition of Durkheim, as a sociological phenomenon (Martin<sup>65</sup>; Wilson<sup>66</sup>). As a doctrine it has mainly come to the fore at times of stress for Christianity. The Gentile question at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts; the Donatist controversy; Constantine’s conversion; the Great Schism East/West; the Reformation are examples of how disputes, conflict and persecution led to questions about the nature and make up of the church. Out of these has grown the denominational landscape we recognise today. More recent ‘stress points’ have been of a different nature. National Socialism in 1930’s Germany and Liberation Theology in 1970’s Latin America presented more political

---

<sup>58</sup> Chartres, C. (2006) *Why I am Still an Anglican* London: Continuum p3

<sup>59</sup> Hauerwas, S. (1995) *In Good Company: Church as Polis* Notre Dame IN: Notre Dame Press p58

<sup>60</sup> Though Jenson points out that “it is only in the late modern period... that the church has become an explicit and systematically central object of theological reflection.” in Gunton, C. (1997) (Ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p207

<sup>61</sup> Dulles, A. 1974 *Models of the Church* New York: Doubleday

<sup>62</sup> Zizioulas, J.D. 2001 *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop During the First Three Centuries* Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press

<sup>63</sup> Boff, L. 1986 *Ecclesiology: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books

<sup>64</sup> Moltmann, J. 1977 *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* Minneapolis: Fortress Press

<sup>65</sup> Martin, D. 1997 *Reflections on Sociology and Theology* Oxford: Oxford University Press

<sup>66</sup> Wilson, B. 1982 *Religion in Sociological Perspective* Oxford: Oxford University Press

challenges to the identity of the church. More recently socio-cultural changes such as secularisation and secularism mean that, as Avis argues the, “ecclesiological focus [has become] intensified as we move deeper into the twenty-first century.”<sup>67</sup>

The work of two theologians, Lieven Boeve and Donald Miller, provided the initial stimulus for the study. Two further writers – Miraslov Volf and Stanley Hauerwas – reflect on the nature and purpose of the church set against a secularising background. Robert Schreiter and others represent some of the literature which shifts the focus of ecclesiology onto the visible, local church. The final two sections focus on the particular emphases of this study – Anglican ecclesiology and ordinary theology.

#### 1.4.1. Challenging voices

Boeve’s “cultural, sociological and philosophical analysis”<sup>68</sup> of Western Christianity raises a number of critical questions. Chief among them is whether, “*the flagging and ineffectual transmission of the Christian tradition* [can] guarantee the survival of the Christian narrative” (Boeve’s italics)<sup>69</sup>. There are some important differences between the Belgian and British contexts, but there are also some striking similarities. Roman Catholicism in Belgium and Anglicanism in Britain have both been high profile institutions long established in society. Both appear to have experienced a decline in numbers and influence during the last five decades. Though a cultural Christian legacy remains in both countries, and there are momentary and quite significant manifestations of that heritage, the place of the church in both contexts is significantly altered.

Boeve’s critique of the secularisation narrative argues that, “an ever-increasing gulf exists between contemporary culture and the Christian faith”<sup>70</sup>. Traditional, cultural Christianity which held sway in the west for centuries now inhabits a very different landscape. Today it competes in a very open – sometimes aggressive – market place of alternative faiths, spiritualites, ideologies and worldviews. It also carries, according to Boeve, the additional burden of “a considerable degree of negative prejudice”<sup>71</sup> towards Christianity as a reaction

---

vii <sup>67</sup> Avis, P. (2002) *Anglicanism and the Christian Church* Edinburgh: T&TClark (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) p

<sup>68</sup> Boeve, L. (2002) *Interrupting Tradition* Leuven, Belgium: Peeters Press

<sup>69</sup> Boeve, L. (2002) *ibid.* p4

<sup>70</sup> Boeve, L. (2002) *ibid.* p6

<sup>71</sup> Boeve, L. (2002) *ibid.* p6



against the monopoly it apparently once enjoyed. Christianity, which in the West, had become a cultural religion is reverting to being a religion of faith<sup>72</sup>. The complication is that the process is not comprehensive meaning two forms of Christianity co-existing, a *cultural residue* form and a *religion-as-faith* form. Rooms<sup>73</sup> highlights the tensions this causes. He suggests the gap between faith and culture is a new experience (for both) in England. Work on integrating them has in the past been “much more starkly required in Africa and other contexts new to Christianity”<sup>74</sup> – but increasingly it is an issue in European contexts.

Boeve’s “ever increasing gulf” offers a pathology of the contemporary scene in which a culture once essentially Christian is moving away from the Christian faith which underpinned it. In this situation the church faces a choice between ‘defensive retrenchment... [and] progressive adaptation.’<sup>75</sup> Does it stand firm against the prevailing culture as some kind of prophetic alternative or does it rebrand itself in a contemporary cultural form?<sup>76</sup> Each has its price.

[t]he strategy of adaptation [gives] the context pride of place and [relinquishes] the tradition. The traditionalist strategy [leads] to a withdrawal into a fossilised tradition and the context [is] rejected as sinful.<sup>77</sup>

In fact, the issue has perhaps more to do with how tradition is viewed than Christianity *per se*: Christianity is perceived to be ‘traditional’ and it is this association rather than scepticism about its truth claims which is the issue according to Boeve.

(Tradition) as a horizon of interpretation for personal and social existence has collapsed in modernity and postmodernity.<sup>78</sup>

Boeve’s answer to his pathology is to argue for what he calls *recontextualisation*. The Christian narrative (and note, he uses *narrative* interchangeably with *tradition*) needs to be seen as an *open* narrative. In fact what he argues is that this is no more than the rediscovery of what that narrative always was. It does not *become* an open narrative: it discovers itself to have been one all along. He describes an open narrative as,

---

<sup>72</sup> Boeve picks this terminology up from A. Vergote’s *Cultuur, religie en geloof*

<sup>73</sup> Rooms, N.J. *English and Christian? Negotiating Christian Cultural Identity Through Imaginative Theological Pedagogy* in *Practical Theology* vol 3; issue 1 2010 pp69-80

<sup>74</sup> Rooms, N.J. *ibid.* p79

<sup>75</sup> Boeve, L. (2002) *op. cit.* p7

<sup>76</sup> See, for example Niebuhr, R. (1951) *Christ and Culture* San Francisco: Harper and Row

<sup>77</sup> Boeve, L. (2002) *op cit* p49

<sup>78</sup> Boeve, L. (2002) *op. cit.* p56

a conceptual exercise designed to explicate what it means for a narrative when it is able to integrate the critical consciousness of our times<sup>79</sup>

An open narrative is characterised by its openness to otherness, its awareness of its own boundaries and thus of its own uniqueness and identity and its ability to be both self-critical and world-critical. As such it can express a genuine openness to and tolerance of other narratives without surrendering its own identity.

Not “surrendering its own identity” is the critical point in Boeve’s use of recontextualisation which rests on what he means by tradition. Christianity needs to move with the times. It must engage with its contemporary context, speak its language, use its conceptual frameworks, and inhabit its culture. This is not however about abandoning tradition in order to appear more fashionable. Fashion can enslave and imprison just as much as adherence to the wrong sort of tradition does. Tradition is dynamic and ever-changing, not static. It is – or should be – a framework not a prison. Boeve demonstrates how Christianity grows by tradition: “For what I received I passed on to you” (1 Corinthians 15:3). In this sense tradition represents a reservoir of memories which empower, root and locate.

Boeve focuses his attention on Roman Catholic Christianity in Europe. Donald Miller studies what he sees as a revolution in American Protestant Christianity in the USA since the 1960s.

[A] new style of Christianity is being born in the United States, one which responds to fundamental cultural changes that began in the mid-1960s.<sup>80</sup>

He goes on,

Appropriating contemporary cultural forms, these churches are creating a new genre of worship music; they are restructuring the organizational character of institutional religion; and they are democratizing access to the sacred by radicalizing the Protestant principle of the priesthood of all believers.<sup>81</sup>

His study indicates that these “new paradigm churches” (Miller’s term) – e.g. Willow Creek, Vineyard, Calvary Chapel – are tapping into “a new era of postdenominational Christianity”<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> Boeve, L. (2002) op. cit. p92

<sup>80</sup> Miller, D.E. (1997) *Reinventing American Protestantism* Berkeley: University of California Press p1

<sup>81</sup> Miller, D.E. (1997) *ibid.* p1

<sup>82</sup> Miller, D.E. (1997) *ibid.* p1

which appears to be more appealing than the mainstream denominations. These churches have successfully crossed the Atlantic over the last forty or fifty years. Many are now well into second generation membership in the UK. In my own home city they are to be found meeting in rented spaces – mainly schools – around the city and a number have taken over buildings vacated by mainstream denominations (the Salvation Army Citadel is now home to a Vineyard Fellowship and at least two other former Methodist churches house such new paradigm fellowships).

The growth they are experiencing is partly through conversion and partly through ‘transfer growth’ driven by a general disillusionment with those institutionalized churches<sup>83</sup>. Miller suggests that a key driver for this change in allegiance lies in a “transformation of consciousness”<sup>84</sup> in which people “pursue their personal, and sometimes narcissistic, paths to self-fulfillment.”<sup>85</sup> What he describes is part of a wider socio-cultural shift prevalent in postmodernity. It applies as much to trades unions, political parties or other organisations as it does to the church. Miller attributes the growth in new paradigm churches to their ability to respond to a number of factors. They offer a “more intense experience of religion” than mainstream churches<sup>86</sup>; they are “better at retaining children when they become adults”<sup>87</sup>; they satisfy individuals’ need for “a sense of significance... and worth within the community”.<sup>88</sup>

In the face of this Miller, himself an Anglican, asks if the mainline churches can survive such an erosion of support. He displays only a qualified optimism. He suggests the mainstream churches need to reinvent themselves along the lines of the new paradigm churches. Placing Miller’s interpretation of the church’s fortunes alongside Boeve’s however, I question whether this is sufficient or indeed, appropriate. He comes nearer to the heart of the issue when he writes of the mainstream churches’ theological task.

---

<sup>83</sup> See for example Goodhew, D. (Ed) (2012) *Church Growth in Britain, 1980 to the Present* Farnham: Ashgate,

<sup>84</sup> Miller, D.E. (1997) *ibid.* p175

<sup>85</sup> Miller, D.E. (1997) *ibid.* p175

<sup>86</sup> Miller, D.E. (1997) *ibid.* p163

<sup>87</sup> Miller, D.E. (1997) *ibid.* p161

<sup>88</sup> Miller, D.E. (1997) *ibid.* p161-162

[A]new generation of theology needs to be written that speaks to the experience of... mainline churchgoers. This theology cannot be derivative, but must emerge out of mainline members' own encounters with the sacred<sup>89</sup>

I take Miller's "new generation of theology" to refer not to a younger generation doing theology (though that is important and necessary) but as the task facing the contemporary mainline churches – the *generating* of a new theology which addresses the contemporary issues.

#### 1.4.2. Ecclesial voices: what is church?

Guyette's bibliographic essay<sup>90</sup> offers an overview of the literature on ecclesiology in the forty or so years since Dulles wrote *Models of the Church* in 1974. It demonstrates the ubiquity of the subject, appearing as it does in several theological disciplines, and it gives some idea of the wealth of literature on ecclesiology. The journal *Ecclesiology*, started in 2004 to meet, "the growing demand for theological resources in the area of ecclesiology"<sup>91</sup>, likewise represents an appetite for ecclesiological studies.

From that large body of literature I want to examine the work of two writers – Miraslov Volf and Stanley Hauerwas – who draw attention to critical issues regarding the context in which the church exists today. The purpose of Volf's major work was,

to counter the tendencies toward individualism in Protestant ecclesiology and to suggest a viable understanding of the church in which both persons and community are given their proper due.<sup>92</sup>

This tendency towards individualism is critically important for the church today. Ironically it may be in the Protestantism itself that we can see the beginnings of this. In challenging the abuses of ecclesiastical power the reformers unleashed reforms which fundamentally changed the way faith was viewed, wresting responsibility for right belief away from the church and placing it squarely on the shoulders of the individual. *Sola fide* ('by faith alone') acquired (unwittingly according to Naphy<sup>93</sup>) the *double entendre* of 'by faith *on your own*'. I

---

<sup>89</sup> Miller, D.E. (1997) *ibid.* p190

<sup>90</sup> *Theological Librarianship: An Online Journal of the American Theological Library Association* Volume 4, Number 1 July 2011

<sup>91</sup> [brillonline.com/content/journals/](http://brillonline.com/content/journals/)

<sup>92</sup> Volf, M (1998) *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing p2

<sup>93</sup> Naphy, W.G. (2007) *The Protestant Revolution* London: BBC Books

can see looking at my autoethnography and examples from my pastoral experience that the relationship between the individual and community illustrate something akin to what Naphy describes. Where once the dominant assumption was that the individual belonged to the institution the dynamic has moved more towards the view that the institution belongs to the individual. There a need for the church to offer a prophetic counter to this individualism, in society at large but also in its own practice and belief. I engage further with this issue in Chapter Four.

The processes of industrialization, urbanization and democratization of the last two hundred years have altered the balance between the individual and the collective and brought the individual much more to the fore. A key feature of British urban society today is mobility, not only in the sense of access to transport but in the way life for many is ‘multi-centred’. We live in one place work in another and worship in yet another. Each one of those places can change frequently in a lifetime. The church on which this study is based is set in a ‘commuter’ village. Very few of the population can now trace their ancestry back to forebears who lived in the village. The majority were born in, have moved from and still work in urban communities. People are mobile and more nomadic that at any time in history. Leslie Newbigin, writing in the 1950s (hence the gendered language) observed that there was a breaking down of community ties, a more transient, nomadic form of life. Families are separated by considerable distances and geographical links to former generations of the family broken.

Western European civilization has witnessed a sort of atomizing process, in which the individual is more and more set free from his natural settings in family and neighbourhood, and he becomes a sort of replaceable unit in the social machine. His neighbours may not even know his name. He is free to move from place to place, from job to job, from acquaintance to acquaintance... He is in every context more and more an anonymous and replaceable part, the perfect incarnation of the rationalist conception of man<sup>94</sup>

He goes on, “In such a situation it is natural that men should long for some sort of real community, for men cannot be human without it.” This is not a new phenomenon. My own family history illustrates the uprooting of families during the agrarian and then industrial

---

<sup>94</sup> Newbigin, L. (2008 edition) *The Household of God* Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers .13

revolutions, migrating from rural Cambridgeshire, Warwickshire and Lincolnshire to the growing industrial conurbation of Sheffield.

In the wake of this kind of population movement comes a host of socio-cultural changes, some of them the product of such fluidity and some of them resistance to it. David Clark captures the paradoxical nature of this when he refers to the, “centrifugal” and “centripetal forces”<sup>95</sup> at work in the postmodern world. The centrifugal force, “dislodges people, their beliefs, values and relationships, from traditional foundations, and thrusts them outwards into a bewildering ‘cosmopolitan’ world”<sup>96</sup> whilst the centripetal force drives them inwards, “in an attempt to retain or reclaim their physical and human roots, their common heritage and a distinctive identity.”<sup>97</sup> This places considerable weight on the individual and community is redefined by new constraints and possibilities. Anthony Giddens describes this major shift in our understanding of self, place and community in modernity. “In conditions of late modernity, we live 'in the world' in a different sense from previous eras of history”<sup>98</sup>. He goes on,

Everyone still continues to live a local life, and the constraints of the body ensure that all individuals, at every moment, are contextually situated in time and space. Yet the transformations of place, and the intrusion of distance into local activities, combined with the centrality of mediated experience, radically change what 'the world' actually is.<sup>99</sup>

The changes have gone even further than Giddens suggested in 1991 as a result of the technological changes we have witnessed in recent decades. The effects of cyberspace<sup>100</sup> and social media on being human are only just starting to be investigated but they already challenge Giddens’ assertion that we are “contextually situated in time and space”.

Community has the potential to move beyond place in significant ways in a cyberspatial world – a world which is largely non-spatial and non-physical and with which people engage chiefly through the mind. It operates 365/24/7, it is unpredictable and unstable. It is global, and it is (so far) devoid of regulation. It also embodies an anonymity which is egalitarian –

---

<sup>95</sup> Clark, D.B., (2005) *Breaking the Mould of Christendom* Peterborough: Epworth Press p5

<sup>96</sup> Clark, D.B. (2005) *ibid*.p5

<sup>97</sup> Clark, D.B. (2005) *ibid*.p5

<sup>98</sup> Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* Cambridge: Polity Press p187 Giddens has subsequently developed this theme in a number of later volumes

<sup>99</sup> Giddens, A. (1991) *ibid*. p187

<sup>100</sup> “the notional environment in which communication over computer networks occurs”  
<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com>

there is no external verifier of the authority each voice carries. Social media has moved beyond simply a means of communication to become a reporter and creator of news. It allows for communication with countless unknown recipients whilst at the same time creating a highly selective social network for intimate and frequent (almost constant) communication. The impact this has on individuals and ways of doing/being community are likely to be far reaching. Like Clark's centrifugal and centripetal forces the internet allows access to the whole world and to a very selective intimate circle.

Like Giddens, Jerome Bruner argues a transactional or reflexive view of the self prevails,

a way of framing one's consciousness, one's position, one's identity, one's commitment with respect to another. Self in this dispensation becomes 'dialogue dependent', designed as much for the recipient of our discourse as for intrapsychic purposes.<sup>101</sup>

Without falling into romantic notions which over simplify the pre-industrial world where this was straightforward, it is nonetheless the case that Clark's centrifugal and centripetal forces have put considerable pressure on the question of identity. It is now possible for an individual to inhabit dual if not multiple worlds in ways they did not before. Growing migration means people are less permanently situated in one place, and are more likely to be dispersed away from family and ancestral roots. "Urban lifestyle is characterized... by the segmentation of human relations."<sup>102</sup> Self and community are of critical importance. Returning to Clark, he suggests the key components of community are "'a sense of solidarity', 'a sense of significance' and 'a sense of security'."<sup>103</sup> He goes on to highlight some limitations of this analysis, particularly with regard to the values a community espouses. Whilst that is an essential element to be discussed there is that further 's' to be added which is, perhaps, more important: the sense of self.

To these voices we could add writers such as Robert Putnam<sup>104</sup> and Robert Bellah<sup>105</sup>. Focusing on American society during the latter half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries they spread the net wider than the church. They persuasively chart the shrinking

---

<sup>101</sup> Bruner, J. (1990) *Acts of Meaning* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press p101

<sup>102</sup> van der Ven, J.A.(1996) *Ecclesiology in Context* Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing p236

<sup>103</sup> Clark, D.B. (2005) *ibid*.p16

<sup>104</sup> Putnam, R. (2000) *op. cit.*

<sup>105</sup> Bellah, R.N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W.M., Ann Swidler, A. and Tipton, S.M. (2007) *Habits of the Heart* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition) Berkeley, California: University of California Press

of social capital which both holds society together and facilitates a healthy sense of self and identity. Putnam observes,

most Americans today feel vaguely and uncomfortably disconnected... Americans are *right* that the bonds of our communities have withered, and we are *right* to fear that this transformation has very real costs.” (original emphasis)<sup>106</sup>

Such shrinkage has brought the individual to the fore whereby we can talk legitimately of *individualism* as a key feature of the current western mind set. Personal identity formation in a pluralist world where the individual is expected to construct her or his identity profile by making choices from a broad selection of possibilities could be described as the west’s dominant socio-cultural project. The reflexive obligation is increasingly laid on each person to *create* her or his own self.

Whilst there may be risks in transporting Putnam’s and Bellah’s findings uncritically across the Atlantic, some commentators have reached similar conclusions about Britain, though with a more political edge. Urban life coupled with the market opportunities of globalization have led to an erosion of communal life through an emphasis on individualism. Tony Judt for example, argues that,

Something is profoundly wrong with the way we live today. For thirty years we have made a virtue out of the pursuit of material self-interest: indeed, this very pursuit now constitutes whatever remains of our sense of collective purpose.<sup>107</sup>

His analysis is, as already suggested, more political than sociological. He goes on to criticize, “the obsession with wealth creation, the cult of privatization and the private sector, the growing disparities of rich and poor.”<sup>108</sup> This, he says, is betrayed in a rhetoric which espouses, “uncritical admiration for unfettered markets, disdain for the public sector, the delusion of endless growth.”<sup>109</sup> Paradoxically, his ideas may travel to the USA more easily than Putnam’s travel to the UK.

Volf develops the idea of this rising individualism with particular reference to Christianity and the church. Quoting research done in the USA he comments that many people see Church membership as important,

---

<sup>106</sup> Putnam, R. (2000) *op. cit.* p402

<sup>107</sup> Judt, T. (2010) *Ill Fares the Land* London: Penguin p1 ff

<sup>108</sup> Judt, T. (2010) *ibid.* p2

<sup>109</sup> Judt, T. (2010) *ibid.* p2



not so much for determining their faith as for supporting it... They see religious institutions as serving the people, not the people serving the institutions.<sup>110</sup>

Volf challenges this individualism in his explanation of what it is to be Christian. Church he argues is an *ἐκκλησία* – a gathering, a congregating. It is neither incidental to nor a by-product of the gospel but central to it. Being a Christian and being church is essentially one and the same thing. Just as individuals need society in order to become persons, so Christians need church, not merely for pragmatic reasons but because ontologically, that is what Christianity is.

The way one becomes a person (anthropologically) and the way one becomes a Christian (soteriologically) both differ and correspond to one another.<sup>111</sup>

They correspond in the sense that the Christian needs the church in order to be, if one might put it so, fully Christian. It is not a functional requirement but an ontological fact. The church does not come about because of sociological or even psychological necessity. The Gospel is not a call to save individuals but to form a new society. So Volf can go on to define a Christian as, “an ecclesially determined being, one destined to live in the church”<sup>112</sup> (Volf’s italics). If we follow this line of thinking then it becomes apparent that the act of gathering should be seen as a performative apologetic since authentic Christianity *is* congregational.

The church *is* not a “we”; the church *are* we....this plural does not express merely a relationless multiplicity. The ecclesial plural is not to be confused with the grammatical plural. While several “I’s” together do constitute a grammatical plural, they do not yet constitute an ecclesial “we”.<sup>113</sup>

One can say “we are the church”: one cannot say “I am the church”<sup>114</sup>. The injunction of the Great High Priestly Prayer of John 17 is that Christians should be in the world but not of the world. Too often this leads to an ‘otherworldliness’ which misses the point. The church is to be in the world incarnating a prophetic alternative to the way the world does community.

What George Lindbeck says of proclamation is true of every form of the confession of faith: “[it] gains power and meaning insofar as it is embodied in the total gestalt of community life and action.”<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> Volf, M (1998) *op. cit.* p16

<sup>111</sup> Volf, M (1998) *op. cit.* p185

<sup>112</sup> Volf, M. (1998) *op. cit.* p178

<sup>113</sup> Volf, M. (1998) *op. cit.* p10

<sup>114</sup> Volf, M (1998) *op cit* pp9-11

<sup>115</sup> Volf, M (1998) *op cit* p 163

This line of argument raises issues with Grace Davie's idea of "believing without belonging"<sup>116</sup> or Alan Jamieson's<sup>117</sup> "Churchless faith". Both these studies posit the idea of continuing personal belief against a background of declining church membership, though they acknowledge that some small scale congregating or fellowship does appear to continue amongst those who leave the church<sup>118</sup>. Volf's view would seem to be that such people are dysfunctional members rather than not Christian. It is not that their absence from church weakens the individual or deprives them of resources but that it weakens the church's message. Regardless of the faithfulness with which they adhere to the faith in their personal life and witness the central message of the gospel is undermined by their absence.

The mediation of the faith can succeed only if those standing outside the faith are able to identify with *the church communities embodying and transmitting it*.<sup>119</sup> (my italics)

Volf's ecclesiology is fundamentally congregational.

Stanley Hauerwas similarly has a strongly communal ecclesiology. He begins *A Community of Practice*<sup>120</sup> with the contention that, "the truth of Christian convictions cannot be divorced from the kind of community the church is and should be." The church community is the place where Christian virtue is practised. Such practice embodies the Gospel and makes it visible to the world in ways which the individual can only achieve in a limited way. Indeed, it is the church as community – which Hauerwas describes as "a storied society"<sup>121</sup> – which develops the character of Christians according to the virtues of the faith.

The ability of the church to interpret and provide alternatives to the narrow loyalties of the world results from the story... that teaches the significance of lives different from our own, within and without our community. Indeed, we only learn what that story entails as it is lived and lives through the lives of others.<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>116</sup> Davie, G. (1994) *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing without Belonging* Oxford: Blackwell

<sup>117</sup> Jamieson, A. (2002) *A Churchless Faith: Faith Journeys Beyond the Churches* London: SPCK

<sup>118</sup> Jamieson for example describes the search "for a place to belong" by those who have left mainstream churches. See Jamieson, A. (2002) *ibid* p152ff.

<sup>119</sup> Volf, M. (1998) *op. cit.* p17

<sup>120</sup> Hauerwas, S. (1981) *A Community of Character* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press p 1

<sup>121</sup> Hauerwas, S. (1981) *ibid* p 91

<sup>122</sup> Hauerwas, S. (1981) *ibid* p 92

James Hopewell<sup>123</sup> argued that the narrative of a congregation – its oral tradition – embodies the church’s identity. The story it tells is both a narrative of understanding as well as a demonstration of what it is to be church. Such stories affirm *that* it is, *what* it is and *why* it is. For Christians, telling their story *is* the church. Indeed, it is not *the* church or *a* church but *church* itself. Edward Schillebeeckx captures this in the *Foreword of Church: The Human Story of God*: “People are the words with which God tells his story”<sup>124</sup>. What both are referring to is communal story telling. It is not the individual’s testimony of conversion. These may have their place but they are not ‘church’ in the sense I have been exploring.

For Hauerwas church is not an abstract theological concept: church *is* the Christian Gospel. He says, “it is in the church that the narrative of God is lived in a way that makes the kingdom possible.”<sup>125</sup> The narrative of the Fall in Genesis tells of humanity at odds with the whole of creation. Adam and Eve hide through fear – fear of God, fear of death, fear of others, fear of the natural world, even fear of self. The Gospel is one of truth (ἀλήθεια) which, as I will go on to discuss in Chapter Four, is more than propositional. It literally means ‘to unhide’. Truth is a process more than a product and is witnessed to in community. Such freedom or truth only makes sense in a social context. Personal salvation, though it may be the prior event is birth (re-birth) into a new community, the church. “[What] makes the church the church”, says Hauerwas, “is its faithful manifestation of the peaceable kingdom in the world. As such the church does not have a social ethic: the church is a social ethic.”<sup>126</sup>

Hauerwas makes one last critical comment which is important for this study and forms a link into the next section of the relevant literature. He makes the bold assertion that, “The people of God are no less an empirical reality than the crucifixion of Christ. The church is as real as the cross”<sup>127</sup>. Arguing that there is no, “mystically existing universal church which is more real than the concrete church” with all its down-to-earth mundane reality he goes on to say,

It is the church of the parking lots and potluck dinners that comprises the sanctified ones formed by and forming the continuing story of Jesus Christ in the world. *In*

---

<sup>123</sup> Hopewell, J.F. (1987) *Congregation: Stories and Structures* Philadelphia: Fortress Press

<sup>124</sup> Schillebeeckx, E. (1990) *Church: The Human Story of God* London: SCM p.xiii

<sup>125</sup> Hauerwas, S. (1984 edition) *The Peaceable Kingdom* London: SCM p 97

<sup>126</sup> Hauerwas, S. (1984 edition) *ibid* p 99

<sup>127</sup> Hauerwas, S. (1984 edition) *ibid* p 107

*effect the church is the extended argument over time about the significance of that story and how best to understand it.*<sup>128</sup> (my italics)

The “extended argument over time” takes us back to Boeve and the question of tradition. If the Gospel is more than just an individual salvation plan, it is also more than a narrative for today. And the church over time and in the contemporary world is that Gospel embodied. As the tenant people say in Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, “How will we know it’s us without our past?”<sup>129</sup>

#### 1.4.3. Ecclesial voices: where is church?

If there is no, “mystically existing universal church which is more real than the concrete church” then studying church must mean looking at concrete examples. Robert Schreiter wrote *Constructing Local Theologies* in 1985<sup>130</sup>. It emerged from the major upheaval caused by Liberation Theology, a movement which had challenged the Western-centric interpretation of the gospel, particularly in the Roman Catholic Church. Whilst the local, the contextual and the indigenous had long been recognised, Schreiter argued that Liberation Theology represented “*a new kind of Christian identity... emerging apart from much of the traditional theological reflection of historical Christianity.*” (Schreiter’s italics)<sup>131</sup> It marked a major shift in the *location* of theological reflection where gospel, church and culture come together.<sup>132</sup> This was an issue early Liberation theologians had grappled with. They were practitioners pressed into writing academic accounts of the movement, a task which did not sit easily with the whole thrust of liberating theology from the academy. Both Liberation theologians and Schreiter argue that theology has to be practised rather than received at the local level. Schreiter asks how a community should “go about bringing to expression its own experience of Christ in its concrete situation?”<sup>133</sup>

Schreiter notes that faith is “*fides ex auditu*, a faith we have heard from others.”<sup>134</sup> Hearing the gospel from others and doing theology at the local level are significant for this study and Schreiter is worth quoting at length at this point. He raises the critical question

---

<sup>128</sup> Hauerwas, S. (1984 edition) *ibid* p 107

<sup>129</sup> Steinbeck, J. (2006) Edition) *The Grapes of Wrath* London: Penguin p 112

<sup>130</sup> Schreiter, R.J. (1985) *Constructing Local Theologies* Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books

<sup>131</sup> Schreiter, R.J. (1985) *ibid.* p3

<sup>132</sup> Schreiter, R.J. (1985) *ibid.* pp20-21

<sup>133</sup> Schreiter, R.J. (1985) *ibid.* pxi

<sup>134</sup> Schreiter, R.J. (1985) *ibid.* p21

Miller does not deal with – the *content* of the theology “that speaks to the experience of... mainline churchgoers.”

The gospel is always incarnate, incarnate in the reality of those who bring it to us, and incarnate in those who help us to nurture the beginnings of faith. Church is a complex of those cultural patterns in which the gospel has taken on flesh, at once enmeshed in the local situation, extending through communities in our own time and in the past, and reaching out to the eschatological realization of the fullness of God’s reign. Thus there is no local theology without the larger church, that concrete community of Christians, united through word and sacrament in the one Lord. *The gospel without the church does not come to its full realization; the church without the gospel is a dead letter. Without church there is no integral incarnation of the gospel.* (my italics)<sup>135</sup>

Schreiter here stresses, like Volf *et al* the integral nature of church to Christian faith, the local nature of the church and the importance of the church beyond the local. He encapsulates Hauerwas’ point made at the start of this chapter that “all theology must begin and end with ecclesiology”<sup>136</sup>.

Emphasising the idea that ecclesiology must pay attention to the local, visible, concrete church is not a new idea. For Barth,

the one, holy, universal, apostolic Church exists as a *visible congregation* which is assembled by God’s Word, comforted and exhorted by God’s Word, and which serves God’s Word in the world<sup>137</sup> (original emphasis)

Some years earlier, in the 1930s Dietrich Bonhoeffer<sup>138</sup> wrote about the “visible church” and put it quite simply: “the Body of Christ can only be a visible body or else it is not a body at all”<sup>139</sup>. Those convictions are being picked up by more contemporary voices. Hauerwas, for example, encourages us to see the church as the primary community to which Christians belong. It is there that the Christian story is not simply told but lived in such a way that it demonstrates (incarnates) the gospel.

This turn to the local may be a manifestation of a more wide-spread socio-political movement which challenges centralization. It may also be part of the move towards civic

---

<sup>135</sup> Schreiter, R.J. (1985) *ibid.* p21

<sup>136</sup> Hauerwas, S. (1995) *op. cit.* p58

<sup>137</sup> Barth, K. (1964) *God Here and Now* trans. Paul M. van Buren London: Routledge and Kegan Paul p70

<sup>138</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. (1937) *The Cost of Discipleship* (2001 Edition: Fourth impression 2006) London: SCM

<sup>139</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. (1937) *ibid* p185

disengagement. ‘Localism’ and ‘localisation’ are much in evidence in political discourse today. Though they are differentiated by sociologists and economists they both broadly refer to,

a strategy aimed at devolving power and resources away from central control and towards front line managers, local democratic structures and local consumers and communities<sup>140</sup>

Volf highlights how what is happening in the church may itself be an example of this socio-cultural shift.

[Those] Catholic theologians representing an ecclesiology moving towards congregationalism are less the actual motor driving these transformations than the seismograph registering and expressing theologically the grassroots movements prompted by social developments.<sup>141</sup>

Reflecting on Bonhoeffer’s doctoral thesis (later published as *Sanctorum Communio*) Volf argues that “[the] invisible church... exists concretely only in the plurality of visible churches”<sup>142</sup>. He goes on to say that “the church is a communion of persons rather than a subject.”<sup>143</sup> The church is a local, concrete, visible reality which, “does *not* stand *over against* individual Christians: rather, Christians *are* the church.” (Volf’s italics)<sup>144</sup> Whatever one says about church flows from reflection upon that community and what it represents. It is a concrete idea, not a philosophical construction. Volf continues:

If one is to speak meaningfully about ecclesiality one must know not only what the church is ... but one must also be able to say *where* church is.<sup>145</sup>

Other voices echo this. According to Andrew Rogers<sup>146</sup> for example, there is a, “growing recognition of the need for ecclesiology to be informed by the practices of the actual church”. Here again we are encouraged to look, not at formularies and creeds but at the

---

<sup>140</sup> Stoker, G. (2007) *New Localism, Participation and Networked Community Governance* University of Manchester, UK/Institute for Political and Economic Governance

<sup>141</sup> Volf, M (1998) *op. cit.*

<sup>142</sup> Volf, M (1998) *op. cit.* p173

<sup>143</sup> Volf, M (1998) *op. cit.* p166

<sup>144</sup> Volf, M (1998) *ibid.* p166

<sup>145</sup> Volf, M. (1998) *op. cit.* p129 Note: Volf uses ‘ecclesiality’ – “the *sine qua non* of what it means for the church to call itself a church in the first place” (Volf, M. (1998) *op. cit.* p126) to capture the idea that church is primarily a practice rather than an entity.

<sup>146</sup> Rogers, A. *Towards Virtual Apprenticeship* in Astley, J. & Francis, L.J. (2013) *Exploring Ordinary Theology* Farnham: Ashgate pp117-126

actual practice of those who 'do' church. Albert Garcia<sup>147</sup> (summarising Carl Braaten's *Mother Church*<sup>148</sup>) goes further in suggesting that,

The local congregations have ontological priority because it is where the church of God is concretely actualized through the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments."<sup>149</sup>

Harald Hegstad likewise highlights the fact that,

belief in the invisible church has often led to an ecclesiology that primarily deals with theological *ideas* about the church, rather than church as concrete reality."<sup>150</sup>

Though this may be true the local, concrete reality is not devoid of ideas about church or that such ideas are unnecessary. Saying that the focus of ecclesiological study should be the local, concrete church does not preclude reflection on the ontological reality of church. What reflection on church should take care to avoid is to make a false distinction between the local, concrete, visible church and a mystical, unseen, universal church. They are one and the same thing. Ecclesiology does need in some way to go *beyond* the local when it articulates the doctrine – but 'going beyond' does not mean 'leaving behind'. Reflection on practice (as suggested in the autoethnography) adds to experience insights and perceptions about significance. What this thesis goes on to show is that if we focus simply on local practice *without* reflection we end up facing the serious question of whether there is anything distinctive about church. Any ecclesiology which focuses entirely on an abstraction of what church is without paying attention to the *practice* of church is like the grin of the Cheshire cat.

Hopewell's work initiated the development of congregational studies. In 2004 Guest, Tusting and Woodhead<sup>151</sup> charted the significant progress made in the UK in congregational studies. A common assumption – and one hinted at by the likes of Boeve and Miller – is that the decline of Christianity is best evidenced by the decline of local church congregations.

---

<sup>147</sup> Garcia, A.L. *The Local Church: A Critical Point of Departure for a World Ecclesiology* in Garcia, A.L. & Wood, S.K. (Eds) (2011) *Critical Issue sin Ecclesiology Essays in Honor of Carl E. Braaten* Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing pp120- 147

<sup>148</sup> Braaten, C.E. (1998) *Mother Church: Ecclesiology and Ecumenism* Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Fortress Press

<sup>149</sup> Garcia, A.L. *op. cit.* p120

<sup>150</sup> Hegstad, H. (2013) *The Real Church: An Ecclesiology of the Visible* Cambridge: James Clarke & Co p3

<sup>151</sup> Guest, M., Tusting, K & Woodhead, L. (Eds) (2004) *Congregational Studies in the UK* Aldershot: Ashgate

Indeed, this is one of the most frequently used indicators of such decline in the prevailing (Western) narrative of secularisation. That decline, however, may have as much to do with changing patterns of social behaviour as with loss of faith – perhaps more so. The shift from religion as a commitment to a faith and thereby to a social group towards the notion of faith as a commodity of choice is prevalent in many areas of life. Declining congregations may therefore be seen more as “a barometer of cultural change rather than the death-knell of Christian Britain”, as Guest suggests<sup>152</sup>. Guest goes on to argue that in the light of this it is necessary to shift the focus from traditional church gatherings to,

more creative, dynamic forms of collective engagement [which] are taking their place, perhaps offering a more culturally authentic option for the post-traditional, late-modern seeker.<sup>153</sup>

Whilst this may be true it is still the case that local congregations in traditional denominations remain stubbornly present in contemporary society. As a number of studies show<sup>154</sup>, many are stable and a significant number are growing.

#### 1.4.4. Anglican voices

Miller raised the question of the fortunes of the mainstream denominations in the contemporary church and secular landscape. We need therefore to consider the ecclesiology of Anglicanism. Bishop Jewel of Salisbury and Richard Hooker were among the first to identify the nature of ‘Anglicanism’<sup>155</sup>. Jewel’s *Apologia pro ecclesia Anglicana* is probably the earliest articulation of the position of the Church of England against the Church of Rome and Hooker’s defence of Anglicanism in *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* summed it up as “catholic and reformed, episcopal and conciliar, national and ecumenical”<sup>156</sup>. Their pragmatic approach to church was to argue that neither ‘Rome’ nor ‘Geneva’ had it all right

---

<sup>152</sup> Guest, M. Reconceiving the Congregation as a Source of Authenticity in Garnett, J., Grimley, M., Harris, A., Whyte, W. and Williams, S.(Eds) 2006 *Redefining Christian Britain* London: SCM pp 63-72

<sup>153</sup> Guest, M *ibid.* p 64

<sup>154</sup> For example, Day, A. (2011) *Believing in Belonging* Oxford: Oxford University Press. Francis, L. J., & Richter, P. (2007). *Gone for good? Church-leaving and returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Peterborough: Epworth Press provides an interesting study of those who have left the mainstream church and what might persuade them to return.

<sup>155</sup> For a succinct study of the origins of ‘Anglican’ and ‘Anglicanism’ see Avis in Sykes, S., Booty, J. and Knight, J. 1998 *The Study of Anglicanism* London: SPCK p460

<sup>156</sup> Avis, P. (2002) *Anglicanism and the Christian Church (2<sup>nd</sup> Edn)* London: T&TClark p31



or all wrong: there must be a *via media* which embraced the good from both<sup>157</sup>. Since then Anglican ecclesiology has been the focus of considerable attention down the years. Paul Avis' *The Identity of Anglicanism*<sup>158</sup> anticipated some of the difficult issues the Anglican Communion had to address at the 2008 Lambeth Conference, key among them being identified in its subtitle, *Essentials of Anglican Ecclesiology*. The previous Lambeth Conference (1998) gave rise to Daniel Hardy's *Finding the Church*<sup>159</sup> in which he sought to describe, "the actual reality and dynamics of Anglican ecclesiology."<sup>160</sup> That reality he concludes is that, "there is no straightforward 'doctrine of the church' but an ongoing theological formation of the practice of church life."<sup>161</sup> Church, he seems to be saying, is a theological journey rather than a point of arrival. As with Hooker, it is a polity in the sense of a process rather than a policy.

Avis' earlier work in 2002 is a more comprehensive survey of the history and nature of Anglicanism. What is significant, apart from the impressive scope and detail of the study, is that Anglicanism – as an 'ism' – is effectively coterminous with ecclesiology. It is more an ecclesiality (to borrow Volf's term) than a denomination, a way of doing church. The pragmatic approach to creating a hospitable community capable of embracing varieties of tradition gave rise not only to a church but also to a way of doing theology. This is carried through in practice in the way Anglicanism has, according to Rowan Williams,

tried to find a way of being a Church that is neither tightly centralised nor just a loose federation of essentially independent bodies – a Church that is seeking to be a coherent family of communities meeting to hear the Bible read, to break bread and share wine as guests of Jesus Christ, and to celebrate a unity in worldwide mission and ministry.<sup>162</sup>

Kevin Ward<sup>163</sup> takes the study of Anglicanism beyond the Church of England drawing attention to the fact that Anglican ecclesiology has migrated around the world. His 2006

---

<sup>157</sup> Though it is worth noting Hooker never uses either 'Anglican' or '*via media*'

<sup>158</sup> Avis, P. (2007) *op. cit.*

<sup>159</sup> Hardy, D.W. (2001) *Finding the Church* London: SCM

<sup>160</sup> Hardy, D.W. (2001) *ibid* p2

<sup>161</sup> Hardy, D.W. (2001) *ibid* p238

<sup>162</sup> "The Challenge and Hope of Being an Anglican Today: A Reflection for the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful of the Anglican Communion" <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/> 27<sup>th</sup> June 2006

<sup>163</sup> Ward, K. (2006) *A History of Global Anglicanism* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p16

book was written with, “the hope and expectation that the Anglican Communion continues to have a distinct role in Christian mission” and Dormor *et al*<sup>164</sup> write confidently of Anglicanism as *the* answer to postmodernity.

If the official line on Anglicanism describes a church which is “catholic and reformed, episcopal and conciliar, national and ecumenical” there is another more colloquial way of seeing it. It came about more through accident than design. That is, it came about as a pragmatic response to the upheaval of the Reformation coupled with the need to discover a new sense of national identity. Its conception was driven by politics rather than philosophical speculation. As such it has always been eclectic, seeking to build on the wisdom and practice of diverse traditions. This is at once its source of great strength and great difficulty. It is nebulous, not in the sense of vague or uncertain but in the sense that it seeks to define the centre rather than the circumference<sup>165</sup>. Chartres captures it well (see above p 24) when she says it is a way of being church which provides a framework for faith rather than a straight-jacket, a collective body where the individual has room to make her own judgements.

#### 1.4.5. Ordinary voices

The literature on ecclesiology raises the issue of where ecclesiology or ecclesiological thinking is located. We can go further by asking where theology itself is located. The study of theology has for a long time focused on ‘formal’ voices (Cameron’s term) – councils, creeds, theologians and clerics. The turn to the local described above represents a significant development in practical theology which has resulted in a different (or additional) focus for the location of theology. Martin Stringer<sup>166</sup> illustrates this well. As a young anthropology student he took a free-standing course on Christian liturgy. It left him

---

<sup>164</sup> Dormo, D., McDonald, J. & Caddick, J. (2003) *Anglicanism: The Answer to Postmodernity* London: Continuum

<sup>165</sup> It may be a little pretentious to liken this to the second aphorism in *Liber XXIV philosophorum* “God: an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere” – but it has something of that about it!

<sup>166</sup> Stringer, M.D. (1999) *On the Perception of Worship* Birmingham: Birmingham University Press

frustrated and he argued that, rather than studying ancient texts about worship, “we should be going out into the ordinary churches... and discovering what real people think.”<sup>167</sup>

Trends in academic disciplines rarely develop in isolation: what emerges in one is often picked up in another. The development of the focus on the personal can be seen in this light. In the mid-1960s Labov & Waletzky<sup>168</sup> presented a paper to the American Ethnological Society on *Narrative Analysis: Oral versions of Personal Experience* which shifted the focus of psychology onto explorations of the individual’s construction of self. It was immensely influential in the emerging field of Narrative Psychology and led to a whole range of responses and developments. In counselling and psychotherapy people such as Carl Rogers<sup>169</sup> and Gerard Egan<sup>170</sup> were challenging the ‘medical’ (Freudian/Jungian based) models of psychoanalysis as esoteric and therapist dominated. They sought to replace it with a ‘person-centred’ approach in which personal narrative provided the key data for both client and therapist. In historical studies oral history<sup>171</sup> turned to largely ignored sources of data (personal stories and eye witness accounts) to assist in historical reconstruction.

The point of including these examples is to suggest that what was developing in a number of academic disciplines was some form of ‘democratisation’. Various disciplines were discovering the ‘voices’ of the people. That is paralleled in the area of theology. There has been a ‘belief’ gap in Christian theology between ‘academic’ and ‘popular’ theology for many years. Montefiore’s comment on the publication of John Robinson’s *Honest to God* that “he’s going to tell the world the sort of things we believe!”<sup>172</sup> indicates the presence of such an attitude among some senior clergy in the Church of England. In various disciplines personal narratives add depth, insight and detail to the ‘public’ narrative. In the case of theology the emergence of ordinary theology is important in different ways. It is a neglected

---

<sup>167</sup> Stringer, M.D. (1999) *ibid* p1

<sup>168</sup> Labov W. & Waletzky, J. *Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience* in Helm, J. (Ed) (1967) *Essays on the Verbal and the Visual Arts: Proceedings of the 1966 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society* Seattle: University of Washington Press pp12-44

<sup>169</sup> Rogers, C. (2003) *Client Centred Therapy* London: Constable and Robinson Publishers (first published 1951)

<sup>170</sup> Egan, G. (2014) *The Skilled Helper (10<sup>th</sup> Edition)* Belmont, CA.:Brooks/Cole (first published 1975)

<sup>171</sup> see for example Perks, R. and Thomson, A. (Eds) (1998) *The Oral History Reader* London: Routledge or Thompson, P. (2000) *The Voice of the Past (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition)* Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press

<sup>172</sup> in Carpenter, H. (1996) *Robert Runcie: The Reluctant Archbishop* London: Hodder and Stoughton p159. Runcie was not at all alarmed by this, saying David Jenkins was already openly teaching such ideas to his students.

source of theology and may therefore contribute to our understanding of how theology develops. It also reveals a significant gap between the 'party line' and 'personal faith'. This gap between what is *voiced* in the reciting of the creed and what is *understood* by the words is an important area for investigation. We already know that part of the postmodern turn is what might be called the 'ascendancy of the personal' – the greater authority, importance or significance accorded to the individual's experience and views. There is (and probably always has been) a persistent 'gap' between what is publicly professed as orthodox faith (or at least within a reasonable distance of orthodoxy) and that faith which is personally held. The loosening of the grip of organised religion on what people believe is a phenomenon worth investigating.

This approach had been anticipated in the general study of religion by writers such as Robert Luckmann.<sup>173</sup> Religious belief resides in places other than councils and creeds: it exists in the lived experience of actual believers. Kim Knott's *The Location of Religion*<sup>174</sup> looks at religion in "everyday spaces".<sup>175</sup>

Inspired by Michel de Certeau's analysis of the practice of everyday life, ordinary, apparently secular spaces began to beckon as potential cases for the examination of religion.<sup>176</sup>

Knott' like Luckman, explores, "the relationship between religion and the physical, social, and cultural arenas in which it is situated."<sup>177</sup> Her method is to use spatial analysis to explore the space religion inhabits, arguing that it is not a discreet, bounded space which is overtly religious or 'sacred'. Religion exists in the lived experience of believers and in all the spaces they inhabit. To this extent what she is asking about are the beliefs and practices of 'ordinary' believers in ordinary spaces.

Nancy Ammerman<sup>178</sup> similarly looks at, "the ways in which non-experts experience religion"<sup>179</sup> in everyday life. She too argues that, whilst we must not discount what organisations or institutions pronounce in their official statements of belief, we must pay attention to those, "who do not make a living being religious or thinking and writing about

---

<sup>173</sup> Luckmann, T. (1967) *The Invisible Religion* New York: MacMillan

<sup>174</sup> Knott, K. (2005) *The Location of Religion* London: Equinox

<sup>175</sup> Knott, K. (2005) *ibid.* p229

<sup>176</sup> Knott, K. (2005) *ibid.* p229

<sup>177</sup> Knott, K. (2005) *ibid.* p1

<sup>178</sup> Ammerman, N.T. (2007) *Everyday Religion* Oxford: Oxford University Press

<sup>179</sup> Ammerman, N.T. (2007) *ibid.* p5

religious ideas.”<sup>180</sup> Ammerman’s work demonstrates that there are religious movements and practices which are ‘outside’ the official religions and a growing number of individuals who ‘do their own thing’. Her interest is not in the ‘spiritual revolution’ where people construct an individual belief system but in the practice of mainstream religions beyond the institutional. Such practice is informed somehow or other by a ‘tradition’ but there is an adaptive element which she and her co-writers seek to understand.

What these have in common is the idea of the ordinary, the everyday and the non-expert – which is what Jeff Astley focused on when he coined the term ‘ordinary theology’:

the theological beliefs and processes of believing that find expression in the God-talk of those believers who have received no scholarly theological education.<sup>181</sup>

Ordinary theology, in contrast to the theology “written by theologians, ecumenists and canon lawyers”<sup>182</sup> is practical theology:

a place where religious belief, tradition and practice meets contemporary experiences, questions and actions and conducts a dialogue that is mutually enriching, intellectually critical, and practically transforming.<sup>183</sup>

Religious belief in this context is about meaning making<sup>184</sup>. Ordinary theology recognises that Christians are engaged in this process at various levels – and always have been – but it also takes seriously the fact that much of the theologizing which they do remains hidden or silent. Astley argues that there is a natural connection between ‘ordinary’ and ‘theology’. It is the ‘God-talk’ of Christians which became disconnected as theology was increasingly professionalized as the domain of the expert. Here we see Holloway’s ‘inner disconnect’ discussed above in the autoethnography – the gap between the party line and the personal faith. Ordinary theology seeks to give a voice to that kind of theology but also to bring it into the public arena of theological thinking and reflection.

As we have already noted Knott and Ammerman explore religion in what Robert Orsi describes as “a more broadly conceived and described life world, the domain of everyday

---

<sup>180</sup> Ammerman, N.T. (2007) *ibid.* p5

<sup>181</sup> Astley J (2002) *Ordinary Theology* Aldershot: Ashgate p1

<sup>182</sup> Podmore, C. (2005) *Aspects of Anglican Identity* London: Church House Publishing p160

<sup>183</sup> Woodward, J. & Pattison, S. (Eds) (2000) *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* Oxford p7

<sup>184</sup> See, for example Victor Frankl’s 1947 book *Man’s Search for Meaning*

existence, practical activity and shared understandings”<sup>185</sup>. Ordinary theology does likewise but we need to note two significant differences. Both Knott and Ammerman look principally at religious belief and practice outside or beyond institutional boundaries. This is a legitimate and important area of belief and practice and is picked up in studies of Christianity by scholars such as Grace Davie<sup>186</sup> and Alan Jamieson<sup>187</sup>. Understanding theological thinking *within* religious institutions however is equally valid. People do not operate in a series of unrelated, bounded or discrete fragments of life. There is a whole world of theological thinking which must be recognised.

Once the thoughts and ideas of ordinary believers are recognised and articulated the question arises of what to do with them. Ammerman’s approach raises a potential problem. She suggests the need to, “*privilege* the experience of non-experts”<sup>188</sup> (my italics). Why should the ‘ordinary’ be privileged and on what grounds? Is the ordinary more authentic, more credible or more important? In coining the term ‘ordinary theology’ Astley rightly discusses more fully what ordinary means. Whilst it may mean ‘usual’ or ‘everyday’ it inevitably carries other connotations which are less helpful. It can mean ‘commonplace’ or ‘undistinguished’ which can lead to its being viewed as secondary or even second-class to that which is ‘special’ or ‘elite’. The danger of some kind of ‘class-war’ in theology appears possible. Astley addresses this in his discussion of the *place* of ordinary theology and its relationship to what at this stage I will refer to as ‘formal’ theology. Place in Astley’s sense is really about purpose: what is ordinary theology *for*? This forms a key part of the discussion in Chapter Four where I address the nature of this relationship more fully.

Astley uses the metaphor of conversation to understand the relationship. He first discusses three forms or models of relating: Tillich’s “dialectical theology” (‘conversation’); Tracy’s revisionist, ‘critical correlation’ approach; Groome’s ‘integration’<sup>189</sup>. Tillich’s existential model relies on Christian theology answering the questions posed by

---

<sup>185</sup> Orsi, R. (2010) *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition) Yale: Yale University Press pp xiii – xiv

<sup>186</sup> Davie, G. (1994) *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing without Belonging* Oxford: Blackwell

<sup>187</sup> Jamieson, A. (2002) *A Churchless Faith: Faith Journeys Beyond the Churches* London: SPCK

<sup>188</sup> Ammerman, N.T. (2007) *ibid.* p5

<sup>189</sup> Astley, J. Ordinary Theology and the Learning Conversation with Academic Theology in Astley, J. & Francis, L. (2013) *Exploring Ordinary Theology* Aldershot: Ashgate pp. 45 - 54

contemporary questions. It prioritizes the context in raising the questions but prioritizes Christian theology in answering them. Tracy's misgivings about this stem from its oppositional character. Context and theology are portrayed as opposing forces in conflict, the latter seeking to shape the former. His preferred approach sees them as co-equal partners in a discussion. Groome looks for some kind of fusion of the voices but this runs the risk of losing the individual identity of each voice.

Astley offers a different model. He argues for Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" where there is a creative tension between two contributors. The ordinary theology of the 'lay' Christian (I use that term here but will discuss it further in Chapter Four) is based on experience and, Astley argues, is, "quite untouched by academic theological study."<sup>190</sup> He goes on to argue that when a Christian encounters theological learning they do so "with something to contribute themselves."<sup>191</sup> This he describes as a conversational dialogue, the result of which is a form of Piagetian adaptation: accommodation (incorporating ideas or concepts from the external unchanged) and assimilation (altering or modifying ideas or concepts from the outside world in order to incorporate them). Because of this, Astley argues, it is necessary to begin with ordinary theology. Such priority is of function rather than status.

Working from a theological action research perspective Cameron *et.al.* <sup>192</sup> elaborate on this conversation with their model of 'theology in four voices', "a heuristic and hermeneutic framework within which to understand the TAR processes."<sup>193</sup> It is just that: a framework. The voices (Formal – the theology of theologians; Normative – scriptures, creeds, official church teaching, liturgies; Espoused – theology embedded in a group's articulation of its beliefs; Operant – theology embedded in the practice of a group) are not discrete, water-tight categories. They are best thought of as foregrounding a particular constituency with the others still present in the background. More importantly they are voices in dialogue. They feed off and into each other. One can see immediately that there are echoes of 'party lines and personal faiths' here but the model helpfully elaborates my earlier over-simple taxonomy. The formal and normative voices do represent 'the party line' and *can* stand in

---

<sup>190</sup> Astley, J. (2013) *op. cit.* p46

<sup>191</sup> Astley, J. (2013) *op. cit.* p47

<sup>134</sup> Cameron, H., Bhatti, D., Duce, C., Sweeney, J. and Watkins, C. (2010) *op. cit.*

<sup>193</sup> Cameron, H., Bhatti, D., Duce, C., Sweeney, J. and Watkins, C. (2010) *op. cit.* p53-54

opposition to ordinary theology. They principally articulate the professional, the orthodox, the tradition. The operant and espoused likewise represent the ordinary. But the model introduces the complexity which group dynamics brings to the picture. Individuals do not operate in isolation: they are influenced by the ideas and practices of those around them. I return to this in Chapter Three when I consider the use of and findings from the focus group.

If the model has a shortcoming it is in not articulating clearly where the voice of the individual resides. The individual draws on and contributes to one or more of these voices; the academic theologian draws on and contributes to one or more of these voices; the local church community draws on and contributes to one or more of these voices, and so on. I think the dynamics of this need to be developed, and that this is particularly important in the area of ecclesiology. The approach I use to address this is interpretive dualism through which people make “practical and theoretical sense of the world” (Soja, 1996<sup>194</sup>). I make the case for this in Chapter Two.

As I have noted, Astley’s idea of ordinary theology has been applied to a number of areas of belief and practice by various writers, for example ordinary Christology (Christie<sup>195</sup>), ordinary hermeneutics (Village<sup>196</sup>), ordinary pneumatology (Cartledge<sup>197</sup>) and an ordinary theology of sex<sup>198</sup>. A number of studies have looked at ecclesiology using this approach<sup>199</sup> but they have not tackled the ecclesiology of regular church goers in local congregations. There are particular reasons why this is so. Ecclesiology is, by definition a collective doctrine. One can have a personal view of church but to *be* church requires others. That is, as already noted, one can say “we are the church” but one cannot say “I am the church”<sup>200</sup>. This raises a number of critical questions, for example where ecclesiology resides in the local church or whether a local church’s *identity* is the same thing as its *ecclesiology*. The more contentious question is to ask if a local church which somehow lacks an ecclesiology is still a church.

---

<sup>194</sup> Soja, E.W. (1996). *Thirdspace*. Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing p5

<sup>195</sup> Christie, A.(2012) *op. cit.*

<sup>196</sup> Village, A. (2007) *op. cit.*

<sup>197</sup> Cartledge, M. (2010) *op. cit.*

<sup>198</sup> Jones, B.F. & Green, G.L. (2015) *Faithful* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing

<sup>199</sup> E.g. Walker, D. How Far is it to Bethlehem : Exploring the Ordinary Theology of Occasional Churchgoers in in Astley, J. & Francis, L.J. (2013) *Exploring Ordinary Theology* Farnham: Ashgate pp.137-14

<sup>200</sup> Volf, M (1998) *op. cit.* pp9-11



## *Excursus 2: Formal ecclesiology*

I said earlier that ecclesiology tends to come to the fore at times of stress for the church, caused by either internal or external factors. In the literature that leads up to the start of this study for example, nineteenth and twentieth century studies of church were driven largely by a mission or ecumenical oriented agenda. The missionary expansion which started in earnest in the eighteenth century can be seen in part at least as denominational expansion (if not empire building). Particular traditions argued the strengths of their own ecclesiology. The ecumenical movement which followed tried to find ecclesiologies which would aid Christian unity. The Church of England and the Methodists spent a good deal of time in the 1960s and early 70s pursuing re-unification. The chief sticking point was ordination but this was based on ecclesiological perspectives which meant there was much discussion about the nature of the church in these two denominations. The impetus for ecclesiological study today has shifted from this kind of internal issue to the pressures placed on the church from outside. Most literature on ecclesiology today is driven by the secularisation narrative.

What is interesting about the literature I have surveyed are the common themes which are present, three of which are particularly important<sup>201</sup>. The centrality of church to the faith is agreed, even if there are differences of opinion as to its place in the pathway to salvation. Is the model for example, *person-church-Christ* (Catholic) or *person-Christ-church* (Protestant)? There are also different views on structure and form. That is, church is at the heart of what it is to be Christian. It is not an optional extra. Secondly church is communal: it is a 'gathering' but one which is more than simply a collection. The word 'member' (as used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 for example) carries a greater sense of belonging than it does in everyday usage such as being a member of a club or society. Matthew's gospel, the most ecclesial of the four, has much to say about the nature of salvation in terms of church. Eschewing an individualist salvation paradigm it presents the church as the place of salvation: "where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Mtt. 18: 20). The literature makes much of the idea that Christianity is not a private, individual matter. It may be personal – indeed, it has to be personal – but the Christian understanding of human

---

<sup>201</sup> I include ordinary theology here as the literature surveyed is that written about it by academics rather than any of its content

redemption is of persons in community. Avis stands as an example of this view when he makes his point about a baptismal paradigm of ecclesiology.

The baptismal paradigm... involves an almost mystical, certainly intuitive, perception of that fundamental ecclesial reality.<sup>202</sup>

The third thing much of the ecclesiological writing has in common is the emphasis on the local, visible, concrete community. Here the pendulum has swung away from understanding the church as a mystical, invisible, transcendent community towards an almost unanimous concern with the 'real' church. This is probably a response to the context in which the contemporary church operates. The secularisation narrative, along with the other meta-narratives of globalisation and postmodernism, force the church to focus on a very temporal, concrete agenda. The stress is on the counter-cultural nature of the church community. But those narratives have another important effect in that they appear to have forced ecclesiological writing to say far less about the wider reality of church. It results in a lop-sided or incomplete ecclesiology. The local church needs to understand itself in relation to its context but it also needs to understand that in so doing it represents a community which transcends time and space.. Failing to see this reduces the church to just another community amongst many. The calling of the church is ontological as well as instrumental.

There is a fourth element in ecclesiological writing to do with Anglican ecclesiology. Volf presents his volume as, "an ecumenical study"<sup>203</sup> in which he examines Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant ecclesiologies. Anglicanism gets a brief mention in a footnote<sup>204</sup> illustrating the old question of where to locate it in the Catholic-Protestant paradigm. In so far as it seeks a wide embrace Anglican ecclesiology can appear to sit comfortably (depending on where you sit *within* it) with a range of views, Catholic or Protestant. Avis sums up the main genius of Anglican ecclesiology when he says,

It is right and proper to love our church, and we should certainly do so, provided we love the mystical Body of Christ, for whom he gave himself, even more. It is in this way, grounded in the "theological virtues" of faith, hope and charity, that we are enabled to recognise the Church of Jesus Christ taking form in the *oecumene* of diverse churches. Marked, though imperfectly and falteringly, in its ecumenical

---

<sup>202</sup> Avis, P. (2002) *Anglicanism and the Christian Church (Second Edition)* London: T&T Clark p354

<sup>203</sup> Volf, M. (1998) *op. cit.* p19

<sup>204</sup> Volf, M. (1998) *op. cit.* p45 fn94

policy by the principles of moderation, comprehension and conservatism, Anglicanism appears to be particularly hospitable to this approach.<sup>205</sup>

Such literature generally has little to say about what the church is. Similarly, in the popular religious press, books on church focus on the doing rather than the being<sup>206</sup>. They are aimed at how to make church bigger, more relevant, more successful. In such literature on church planting, church growth, church management, church leadership, church building and church worship they do little more than make cursory comments on what the church is. Presumably it is assumed this is self-evident.

---

<sup>205</sup> Avis, P. (2002) *op. cit.* p354

<sup>206</sup> There are notable exceptions such as Gibbs, E. & Bolger, R.K. (2006) *Emerging Churches* London: SPCK. See also Mark Mason *Impossible Ecclesiology? John D. Caputo and the Emerging Church (Movement?)* Unpublished lecture Ecclesiological Investigations Network 2007. Mason's theory is that the new paradigm churches, in coming to terms with postmodernism and post structuralism, are engaged in a process of deconstructing church.

## 2. “Watching what the community does”<sup>207</sup>: Method and Methodology

### 2.1. Methodological assumptions and analytical method

Daniel Hardy says, “[the] actual reality and dynamics of Anglican ecclesiology [need] serious attention if the Anglican churches are to thrive.”<sup>208</sup> There are a number of ways of studying “intractable object”<sup>209</sup> which is church. The methodology employed is ordinary theology. The ontological perspective of the study is that ecclesiology operates on a number of levels. It is an article of faith expressed in the historic creeds and formularies of the church. It is a denominational expression of how those creeds and formularies are embodied in the beliefs and practice of particular manifestations of the church such as *Roman Catholic* or *Lutheran* ecclesiology. It is (as noted in the introduction),

constructed and ever reconstructed by the grace-enabled activities of its members as they embody the church’s practices, beliefs and valuations.<sup>210</sup>

Church is primarily something its members experience in concrete terms, a belief embodied in practice. Williams’ observes beliefs about Christian doctrines,

are to be discovered by watching what the community does... when it is acting, educating or ‘inducting’, imagining and worshipping.<sup>211</sup>

Such ‘discovery’ calls for the study of an actual church. That is, epistemologically, we can ‘find’ the church in Hardy’s sense by going to *a* church.

The method of analysing the data is a grounded theory approach in which themes emerge during the research process. ‘Emerge’ is the critical word. It is possible to use an approach like Neuman’s three stage coding method<sup>212</sup> at the end of the data gathering. This requires open coding looking for common themes based on a broad view of the material, not initially identifying hidden or underlying ones, followed by axial coding which shifts the focus from the surface to more detailed themes. Selective coding refines the axial coding

---

<sup>207</sup> Williams, R. (2000) *On Christian Theology* Oxford: Blackwell pxii

<sup>208</sup> Hardy, D.W. (2001) *op. cit.* p2

<sup>209</sup> Barth K quoted by Jenkins, M. (1999) *The Church Faces Death: Ecclesiology in a Post-Modern Context* Oxford: Oxford University Press p70

<sup>210</sup> Healy, N. (2000) *op. cit.* p5

<sup>211</sup> Williams, R. (2000) *op. cit.* pxii. Williams speaks of “the meaning of the word ‘God’”

<sup>212</sup> Neuman, N.W. (1991) *Social Science Research Methods* Needham Heights, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon p415ff

still further by identifying themes of particular significance. But this fails to capture the heuristic nature of this type of research whereby discoveries made along the way shape the research as it goes along. A two stage process of gathering then analysing is artificial. Analysis begins as soon as the data gathering starts, illustrating Frances Ward's comment that, "ethnography is a messy business."<sup>213</sup>

The principle framework for interpreting the data emerged during the course of the interviews as a form of interpretive dualism. I began with a conceptual framework which worked on a binary model describing the perceived tension between 'what I am supposed to believe' and 'what I actually believe'. This model proved to be too static. People shift in their beliefs and opinions rather than simply inhabiting one or the other such that the, "categorical and closed logic of either/or" is better replaced by a, "dialectically open logic of *both* and *also*"<sup>214</sup> A number of models were explored which managed this dichotomy better, from opposites or polarities to points on a continuum, to centres of gravity in a Venn diagram. Edward Soja's spatial concept of 'thirding' or 'othering'<sup>215</sup>, which he developed based on the work of Lefebvre, offers a more creative way of understanding this tension or polarity. By using an interpretive dualism I can describe binary pairing which are not opposites or polarities but rather boundary markers which create a space within which people make "practical and theoretical sense of the world"<sup>216</sup> they inhabit. This allows us to treat a specific doctrine – in this case ecclesiology – as a discrete area within a wider framework of beliefs by placing perceptual limits on it ("the points beyond which", according to Mezirow, "something does not continue"<sup>217</sup>) and allowing a fluidity of interpretation of the data. This is explored further in Chapter Three where the specific of aspects of ecclesiology are described.

## 2.2. Overview of the research project and defence of the methods used

---

<sup>213</sup> Ward, F. The Messiness of Studying Congregations using Ethnographic Methods in Guest, M., Tustig, K. and Woodhead, L. (2004) *Congregational Studies in the UK* Aldershot: Ashgate pp125-137

<sup>214</sup> Soja, E.W. (1996) *op. cit.* p60

<sup>215</sup> His approach has considerable similarities to Bakhtin's ideas of *dialogism* though he makes no reference to this.

<sup>216</sup> Soja, E.W. (1996). p60

<sup>217</sup> Mezirow, J. (1981). A critical theory of adult learning and education. *Adult Education*, 32(1), 3-24.

The study uses five sources of data. I began with an autoethnography followed by a period of two years embedded in the congregation undertaking an ethnographic study. During the course of this I used semi-structured one-to-one interviews (conversations) with selected members of the congregation. Those people came together as a focus group in which they were, “encouraged to talk to one another: asking questions, exchanging anecdotes and commenting on each other’s experiences and points of view.”<sup>218</sup> The final research tool was to study texts generated by the church. In interviews and ethnography *text* often refers to transcripts and written versions of data. Here I take it to refer to the documentary evidence produced by the church – magazines, newsletters, notice sheets, advertising and publicity for example. Interacting with the church members on a regular basis meant that many conversations with members of the congregation (what Silverman refers to as “naturally occurring talk”<sup>219</sup>) took place quite frequently, sometimes with those who had been interviewed. There is therefore some overlap between interviews, focus group and conversations.

In order to comply with the research ethics policy of the university a full proposal was submitted to the research ethics committee. In the portfolio I noted, “research ethics is not simply associated with compliance, [but is] integral to good research.”<sup>220</sup> Researching matters of faith and church membership brings its own particular ethical issues. I identified three. Firstly, the possible impact on the leadership of the church when members of the congregation are being asked to reflect independently of them on the nature of their church. Secondly, the possible impact of using a selected group within a congregation. Thirdly, interviewing involves a degree of self-disclosure and personal reflection which though it can be empowering and creative it can also involve risks. Appropriate consent was sought for the research and steps were taken to minimize these particular risks which are described later in this chapter. Alongside these regular meetings were held with the incumbent (who is fully supportive of the project) to review the progress of the research.

---

<sup>218</sup> Kitzinger, J. *Introducing focus groups* *BMJ* Volume 311 29<sup>th</sup> July 1995 pp299-302

<sup>219</sup> Silverman, D. (2014) *Interpreting Qualitative Data (Fourth Edition)* London: SAGE Publications p274

<sup>220</sup> Russell, C., Hogan, L. and Junker-Kenny, M. (2012) *Ethics for Graduate Researchers: a cross-disciplinary approach* London: Elsevier p2

Going to a church is taken quite literally. I studied the congregation of which I am a member, initiating the two year research period with a talk to the whole congregation and an article in the church magazine. The project was introduced under the title *What on earth is church?* The research is an ethnographic study in which the researcher is, “concerned with observing, (re)constructing and writing lives and experiences of *Others*”<sup>221</sup> (original emphasis). Ethnography is committed to “the first-hand experience and exploration of a particular social or cultural setting on the basis of (though not exclusively by) participant observation.”<sup>222</sup> The theology of a local church, however, is dispersed. That is to say, it resides in a variety of places, from the formal statements the church makes to the beliefs of individual members. It is to be found in practices and behaviours as well as group consciousness. The methods employed within an ethnographic framework therefore need to capture this variety.

Ethnography is being used increasingly in congregational studies. It involves detailed observation taking into account, “the architecture, the furniture, the spatial arrangements, the ways people work and interact, the documents they produce and use, the contents of their communication, the timeframe of social patterns...”<sup>223</sup> In Ward’s edited volume<sup>224</sup> Paul Fiddes argues that, in spite of their apparent differences, it is “essential for *theology* to bring ... together”<sup>225</sup> (original emphasis) deductive ecclesiology and inductive ethnography. “Faith”, he says, “is not a mere matter of words but is *embodied*: it takes bodily form in the life of the community as people live together” (original emphasis).<sup>226</sup> In adopting this method Fiddes reminds us that we are engaged in a piece of practical theology. It is not an ethnographic, sociological or anthropological study of a community which happens to be religious but a piece of practical *theology*, “where religious belief, tradition and practice meet contemporary experiences, questions and actions”<sup>227</sup>. Its purpose is to inform the belief and practice of the church. The starting point of ethnographic study is participant

---

<sup>221</sup> Coffey, A. *Ethnography and Self: Reflections and representations* in May, T. (2002) *Qualitative Research in Action* London: Sage Publications pp313-331

<sup>222</sup> Atkinson, P., Coffey, A., Delamint, S., Lofland, J. and Lofland, L. (2007) *Handbook of Ethnography* London: SAGE Publications p4

<sup>223</sup> Eberle, T. and Maeder, C. *Organizational ethnography* in Silverman, D (Ed) (2011) *Qualitative Research* London: SAGE Publications pp53-74

<sup>224</sup> Fiddes, P. *Ecclesiology and Ethnography: Two Disciplines, Two worlds?* in Ward, P. (Ed) (2012) *Perspectives on ecclesiology and ethnography* Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans pp13-35

<sup>225</sup> Fiddes, P. (2012) *ibid* p15

<sup>226</sup> Fiddes, P. (2012) *ibid* p19

<sup>227</sup> Woodward, J. & Pattison, S. (Eds) (2000) *op. cit.* p7

observation.<sup>228</sup> The easier part of this is the observation. Watching and listening to the church members, individually and collectively, is relatively straightforward and this is described in more detail later in this chapter.

The participation element is more problematic. As an ordained priest I had some involvement with the church during an interregnum and I occasionally preach and lead worship. At the time of the field work I was also a lecturer in theology at a university. Being an ordained theologian therefore makes it hard to 'blend in'! It also sets me apart from 'ordinary theologians' – an issue we will address in Chapter Four. In undertaking the research two steps were taken to try to mitigate these problems. The first was to immerse myself in the congregation as much as possible as an ordinary member. To that end I only preached and led services very occasionally during the research period. Lay members of the congregation did this regularly as well (more often than I did) so it was normal practice in the church for 'ordinary' members to be seen in these roles. I involved myself in as many of the ordinary activities of the church as possible. I went on the sidespersons rota, served tea and coffee after morning service, joined a Lent group, helped with delivering publicity leaflets, gave lifts to church events. It is impossible to be fully integrated in this way but a measure of its success was that when I *did* lead or preach – and turned up wearing a clerical collar – the most common comment was "I'd forgotten you were a vicar".

The second – and more major – decision was to use autoethnography to frame the context of the research question. James Olive points out that,

given the inescapable subjectivity that every researcher brings to a study through his or her past experiences, ideas and perspectives, a solely emic perspective is impossible to achieve.<sup>229</sup>

This suggests an etic approach would be the solution, but a purely etic approach to a study,

risks the possibility of overlooking the hidden nuances, meanings and concepts within a culture that can only be gleaned through interviews and observations.<sup>230</sup>

---

<sup>228</sup> Schensul, S., Schensul, J. and LeCompte, M. (1999) *Essential ethnographic methods: Observations, interviews, and questionnaires* London: Altamira Press p91

<sup>229</sup> Olive, J.L. (2014) Reflecting on the Tensions Between Emic and Etic Perspectives in Life History Research: Lessons Learned. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 15 (2)

<sup>230</sup> Olive, J.L. (2014) *ibid*



The etic and the emic appear to be in tension, but, rather than being contradictory or irreconcilable these approaches working together stimulate each other (see for example, Morris, Leung, Ames and Lickel<sup>231</sup>). Patton likewise maintains that, in a qualitative study,

the challenge is to do justice to both perspectives [the emic and the etic] during and after fieldwork and to be clear with one's self and one's audience how this tension is managed<sup>232</sup>

“Doing justice to both perspectives” and managing the tension is safeguarded in this study by the use of autoethnography, a research method which goes beyond the autobiographical and, “make[s] the researcher's own experience a topic of investigation in its own right”<sup>233</sup> It goes beyond the autobiographical in that although it *is* a personal narrative it, “displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural”<sup>234</sup>.

As a research method it has developed considerably in recent years<sup>235</sup>. Heewon Chang<sup>236</sup> argues that “analytical and interpretive orientation is the crux of autoethnography as a qualitative research process”<sup>237</sup> but she also warns autoethnographers against the dangers of neglecting context, relying too much on personal memory without corroborating data and ignoring ethical issues relating to the privacy of those included in the narrative<sup>238</sup>. Holman Jones, Adams and Ellis<sup>239</sup> argue that, beyond the usefulness of personal (autobiographical) writing as data for studying culture, autoethnography is distinguished by

---

<sup>231</sup> Morris, M.W., Leung, K., Ames, D. and Lickel, B. Views from inside and outside: Integrating emic and etic insights about culture and justice judgment *Academy of Management Review* 1999, Vol. 24. No. 1: 781-796.

<sup>232</sup> Patton, M.Q. (2010) *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage p268

<sup>233</sup> Ellis, C. and Bochner, A.P. (2000) Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher As Subject in Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds.) *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage pp. 733-768 p.733

<sup>234</sup> Ellis, C. and Bochner, A.P. (2000) *Ibid* p.739

<sup>235</sup> E.g. Chang H (2008) *Autoethnography as method* Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press Inc; Etherington K (2004) *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher: using our selves in research* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers; Anderson L *Analytic Autoethnography in Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35, no. 4 (2006): 373-395

<sup>236</sup> Chang H in Chang H and Boyd D (Eds) (2011) *Spiritualities in Higher Education: Autoethnographies* Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press Inc

<sup>237</sup> Chang H in Chang H and Boyd D (Eds) (2011) *Ibid* p15

<sup>238</sup> Chang H in Chang H and Boyd D (Eds) (2011) *Ibid* p16

<sup>239</sup> Holman Jones, S., Adams, T. and Ellis, C. (2013) Coming to Know Autoethnography as More than a Method in Holman Jones, S., Adams, T. and Ellis, C. (Eds) 2013 *Handbook of Autoethnography* Walnut Creek CA: Left Coast Press pp17-47

a number of features. It is a *purposeful* critique of cultural practices; it makes a conscious contribution to *research*; it embraces *vulnerability*; and it creates *a reciprocal relationship* between researcher and researched (my italics)<sup>240</sup>.

Because autoethnography embraces vulnerability and creates this reciprocal relationship between researched and researched it is also a means of furthering the rapport already mentioned. Self-disclosure can be empowering, liberating, educative, creative and more but it can also be risky. There may be dangers which surface in the telling; there may be unintended outcomes from the exploration; there may be insights and understandings articulated for the first time. Notwithstanding these dangers Chang suggests,

...if researchers can manage the extent of self-exposure and their vulnerability wisely and become cognizant of potential problems with the researcher-participant blending, they may be able to turn potential problems into benefits inherent in this self-focused research method.<sup>241</sup>

Autoethnography therefore has distinct advantages. It enables me to bring into the open Olive's "inescapable subjectivity" (see above p57) of the emic. It allows me to see my own ecclesiology as a contributor and dialogue partner with those in the church to which I belong. Later in the study (Chapter Five) I return to the use of autoethnography. Events in the church after the research period was concluded have extended its use as a pastoral as well as a research tool.

## 2.3.Methods

### 2.3.1. Choosing an ecclesial community

The choice of the particular church on which the study is based was to some extent accidental. As a result of pastoral re-organisation in the diocese the choice of field-site in the original research proposal<sup>242</sup> had to be changed. At the same time I had left one pastoral context and was thinking through what the next would be. I had been to this church on a number of occasions as a visiting priest during an interregnum but when the new incumbent arrived I decided to continue attending as a member. This in itself is an example of an approach to church 'belonging' which I investigate later in the thesis. After

---

<sup>240</sup> Holman Jones, S., Adams, T. and Ellis, C. (2013) *ibid.* p22

<sup>241</sup> Holman Jones, S., Adams, T. and Ellis, C. (2013) *Ibid* p16

<sup>242</sup> See Portfolio

some months I discussed the possibility of the research project with the incumbent and then introduced it to the congregation.

The village church of Dunston (the names of the churches and participants have been changed to preserve their anonymity) is suitable choice for three reasons. First, it is a 'mainstream' example of Anglicanism. My own context is as an Anglican priest and the study is driven by a desire to explore its ecclesiology. I also have (natural) concerns for its present and future fortunes. Two of the key voices I have engaged with throughout the study set a critical challenge for mainstream denominations such as Anglicanism. Boeve<sup>243</sup> asks how they will cope with competing claims on the allegiance of a dwindling membership and, "a considerable degree of negative prejudice"<sup>244</sup> towards Christianity in general and mainstream denominations in particular. Miller<sup>245</sup> similarly asks whether mainline churches can survive in the light of eroding support. Miller took "a new generation of theology" to mean a contemporary expression of the faith but I extend this notion to the *generation* of theology in the local church context – how church members process their "encounters with the sacred".

Second, the church is an appropriate size. It is large enough to embrace a sufficient diversity of participants in terms of ages, traditions and backgrounds such that sampling could be representative and observations manageable. Dunston parish church has a regular Sunday congregation of around 70/80 at its Sunday morning service, around 40 at its Sunday afternoon Family Service and between 15 and 25 at other regular services (Sundays and midweek). There are currently 82 people on the electoral roll.

The third advantage is its location. St. Mary's Church, Dunston is one church in a united benefice which also includes the parishes of Holy Trinity, Halton, Holy Trinity, Oakton and St Mary's, Warton. Dunston, the largest village and church in the benefice, lies about five miles east of the centre of York, close to the outer ring road and between two arterial roads leading into York. It is a commuter village of around 3500 people with easy access to the major conurbations of York, Hull, Leeds and Bradford and *via* these to rail links north, south and west. The village has a Church of England primary school of around 250 pupils.

---

<sup>243</sup> Boeve, L. (2002) *op..cit.*

<sup>244</sup> Boeve, L.(2002 ) *op. cit.* p6

<sup>245</sup> Miller, D. (1997) *op. cit.*

Secondary school pupils are bused to a variety of schools in and around York. 40% Of the population are under 30 with 18% under 17 and 23% over 60. The majority (66%) own their own home and unemployment is below the national average<sup>246</sup>. There is a small Methodist church in the village served by a Circuit Minister based in York.

York and its environs have a considerable range of types of church. There is York Minster and a significant number of Anglican parish churches covering a whole range of styles of worship and traditions. Other denominations are represented by Methodist, URC, Pentecostal and Baptist churches. There are several Roman Catholic churches, a Salvation Army citadel as well as a central Friends Meeting House. There are also several new paradigm, non-denominational churches. New Frontiers, Calvary Chapel, Vineyard Fellowships, Global Network and Living Word Church are amongst those represented in the city. This diverse range of churches within relatively easy distance is significant as the fieldwork shows (Chapter Three).

### 2.3.2. Practicing church: ethnography

As much as possible during the period of ethnographic research I operated as an 'ordinary' member of the congregation. Events, activities and behaviours were logged along with informal conversations and comments made by church members. Notes were also made at church services logging material which suggested explicit and implicit ecclesiological understandings. The notes were sometimes in written form but on occasions it was more convenient to use a digital recorder in which case these notes were transcribed later. Some of the material gathered was repeated that gathered in other contexts, for example informal conversations at church events repeated ideas put forward in one-to-one interviews. Such material is not duplicated in the analysis. As already stated the key questions driving the observations were: "Who goes to what (events, activities, worship) and why?"; "What does this behaviour reveal about their understanding of church?" Such questions were, as far as possible, based on church members explaining these things rather than by me making guesses or assumptions.

---

<sup>246</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government/about/statistics](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government/about/statistics)

Being a multiple benefice some of the observations took place in other churches in the benefice and in the local Methodist Church (the benefice is in a Local Ecumenical Partnership with the Methodists). On these occasions I confined myself to observations of and conversations with members of St Mary's Dunston for the purposes of the study.

### 2.3.3. Talking about church: interviews and conversations

Being a member of the church for a period of time before the research began gave me the opportunity to choose interviewees with some insight. I discussed that selection with the incumbent to ensure there were no reasons why it would be inappropriate to involve them (see Portfolio –*Research Proposal*). I selected twelve members of the church (about 15% of the regular congregation), six men and six women ranging in age from 20 to 78. The sample represents those who came to faith later in life, those born into church going families and those from Anglican and non-Anglican backgrounds. All but one of those interviewed have moved to the village, only one of them having a long-standing family connection with the place. The interview process depends upon developing a rapport between interviewer and interviewee. To that end there was an informal preliminary meeting with each participant, usually over coffee after a church service, before the recorded interview took place.

The semi-structured interviews lasted between 45 minutes to a little over an hour. The location of the interview was determined by the interviewee, the majority taking place in their home, two in my office at the university and two in the church lounge. The interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed. Two interviewees subsequently sent emails containing further reflections on our conversations and informal conversations continued with most of the interviewees in the course of normal encounters at church and village events.

I have so far referred to these interactions as interviews. In a short pilot study I used semi-structured interviews to trial the questions I planned to ask. I became aware in analysing this data that, in spite of having an outline of questions to follow, on several occasions the interview broke down in the sense that they became more dialogic. They became, in fact, conversations. This led to re-thinking the process in order to embrace this. Interviewing has an inherent two-sided problem: it creates a disparity of power such that it

‘hides’ the voice of the researcher. As a member of the church embedded in the congregation my own experience and voice cannot be artificially suspended so that one minute I am an ‘ordinary’ church member and the next I am ‘researcher’. Such a power dynamic would perpetuate the very issue which had prompted the study in the first place – the notion of “*what I am supposed to believe and what I actually believe*”. Conversation is a more natural way of communicating. Whilst the researcher maintains control over the agenda, conversation,

involves a dialogic participation that holds a deep purpose of sharing story as a means to assist others. It is *relational* at its core.<sup>247</sup> (my italics)

Re-conceptualising the interview data as conversation has a further benefit. The research is not segregated out into a discrete area of my membership. Research in a lived environment is about Einstein’s “holy curiosity” – it goes on all the time for the practical theologian<sup>248</sup>. Silverman’s “naturally occurring talk”<sup>249</sup> takes place informally as part of the day-to-day interaction with members of the church needs to be considered along with the more structured one-to-one sessions. Indeed, it goes further in that, as already noted, in many cases there were subsequent conversations with the interviewees outside the more formal process.

Conversation brings equality, challenge, dialogue. It may affect the data – change people’s minds – but that includes the researcher as well. I was conscious of my preconceptions shifting as I did the study. Presuppositions were challenged and what resulted was a more nuanced, more clearly understood ecclesiology (implicit as well as explicit) which would not have emerged through a more one-sided interview method.

#### 2.3.4. Talking about church: focus group

The conversations with individuals yielded insights into personal ecclesiologies. But, as suggested earlier in the thesis, ecclesiology has a collective aspect to it and this was explored through the use of the focus group as well as the ethnographic observations.

---

<sup>247</sup>Kovach, M. Conversational Method in Indigenous Research in *First Peoples Child & Family Review* Volume 5 Number 1 (2010) pp. 40-48

<sup>248</sup> As indeed it should for the one given the ‘cure’ of souls – sanctified nosiness is a tool of the pastoral carer.

<sup>249</sup> Silverman, D. (2014) *Interpreting Qualitative Data (Fourth Edition)* London: SAGE Publications p274

Asking people to reflect together introduces a new element to the process in the form of group dynamics<sup>250</sup>. Those dynamics are important to note: for example, in this group the first speaker's comments set the tone and agenda of the first part of the discussion. All the participants had been interviewed individually and so had already 'practised' articulating their ideas on church. What happened in the group was the presentation of their individual ideas endorsed, modified, expanded or challenged by those of others in the group. It is possible to detect the individual voices of those interviewed with what was said in the focus group. What emerged had elements of a kind of consensus ecclesiology but also some disagreements. The group discussion was recorded but not transcribed. Key themes and ideas which emerged were noted but when analysing the data what was *not* said was also considered.<sup>251</sup>

A thematic analysis approach is adopted using a coding method similar to that applied to the textual evidence (see below).

### 2.3.5. Writing about church: texts

'Texts' is taken to mean any documentary, written material produced by the church and its members. The church has a part-time, paid web-editor who manages the web-site, the parish magazine (*Grapevine*) and the weekly newsletter, both of which are available on-line and in hard copy. *Grapevine* covers all four communities in the benefice and includes local, news, events and contributions from the whole community, not just the church. It is sold in local shops and delivered to subscribers. The website contains links to a number of groups and activities in the church as well as podcasts.

In addition to these documentation of a more formal kind is openly available. PCC minutes, Annual General Meeting reports and agendas and the parish profile all provide insights into the church's identity and understanding. There was also an extensive survey of the congregation carried out by the PCC when new patterns of worship were being

---

<sup>250</sup> An interesting example of this is Andrew Todd's unpublished PhD thesis *The talk, dynamics and theological practice of Bible-study groups: A qualitative empirical investigation* (Cardiff University 2009) where he examines "interpretation-in-interaction" through conversational analysis looking at the impact of group dynamics in biblical interpretation (p288).

<sup>251</sup> See for example, Pedwell, C. "Often What is Not Said is Just as Important as What Is": *Transnational Feminist Encounters* in Davis, K. and Evans, M. (2016) *Transatlantic Conversations* Abingdon: Routledge pp145-154

considered. This was written up as a consultation document and contains some useful information.

The third source of written material can be loosely referred to as 'advertising'. Notice boards, both inside the church and on the street front often replicate what appears in the magazine or on the web-site but occasionally there was material relevant to the study.



## PART TWO: The research and its outcomes

### 3. “Finding the Church”<sup>252</sup>: Ordinary ecclesiologies

#### 3.1. Talking and doing church

The data generated by the research reveals the nature and content of the ecclesiology held by individuals and the congregation. In congregations lives converge and are shared. Consciously and unconsciously that sharing creates the language of a congregation, which Hopewell describes as,

a negotiation of metaphors, a field of tales and histories and meanings that identify its life, its world, and God.”<sup>253</sup>

In this study there is a three-way conversation between “the researcher, the congregation and the Christian tradition(s)”<sup>254</sup>. The autoethnography gave an account of the researcher, who I am and what I have come to believe about church. Here, I bring in the “field of tales and histories and meanings” of the congregation.

The study was introduced to the congregation under the title *What on earth is church?* This translated into the key question which guided the ethnographic study, the written data and which was put to the participants and focus group, “What is church and why belong?” The data generated from this speaks to four key themes which emerge from the literature review and the autoethnography. They cover issues concerning: the place of the individual in society and the relationship between the individual and the collective; the location of church, particularly in time and space; the fortunes of mainstream denominations in what appears to be a ‘post-denominational’ age; the location and sources of theological thinking. This raises the question of the extent to which the ecclesiological thinking in the local church (to adapt Niebuhr’s typology<sup>255</sup>) is an ecclesiology *of* culture and/or an ecclesiology *against* culture. That is, the ways in which ecclesiology mirrors or opposes contemporary culture. It does both of course, and I return to this in Chapter Four.

---

<sup>252</sup> Hardy, D.W. (2001) *op. cit.*

<sup>253</sup> Hopewell, J.F. (1987) *Congregation: Stories and Structures* Philadelphia: Fortress Press p5

<sup>254</sup> Rogers, A. *Congregational Hermeneutics: Towards Virtuous Apprenticeship* in Astley, J. and Francis, L.J. (Eds) 2013 *Exploring Ordinary Theology* Farnham: Ashgate pp.117 - 126

<sup>255</sup> Niebuhr, H.R., (2001 edition) *Christ and Culture* New York: Harper Collins

The way church is talked about in the data is, on the surface at least, pragmatic: church is something you ‘do’, somewhere you ‘go’. Church is also itself there to ‘do’ things. This is where the interpretive dualisms discussed in Chapter Two emerged. Thinking of this as the *instrumental* view of church, preoccupied with what the functions the church fulfils, highlights the way church is also spoken of as having some kind of reality beyond the functional. Church does what it does because of what church *is*. Labelling this the *ontological* gives the first of the binary pairings which articulate how church members understand church and how they relate to it. The second pairing develops the ontological by identifying church in the here and now – its *temporal* reality – and church as something which goes beyond the here and now, both spatially and temporally – its *transcendent* reality. The third pairing is slightly different. It articulates the relationship between the individual and the church. The binary pairing for this employs Rowan Williams’ terminology of *patron – subscriber*<sup>256</sup>. Williams’ observes that,

we generally prefer these days to be patrons rather than subscribers: we reserve our liberty in regard to our various affiliations rather than committing ourselves to regular and unquestioning support<sup>257</sup>

These three pairings of *instrumental – ontological*, *temporal – transcendent* and *patron – subscriber* give me the interpretive dualisms through which I can understand ordinary ecclesiologies, the conceptual spaces the church members inhabit. In the following paragraphs material from the data is written in italics and individual names are pseudonyms. In some cases a comment or document carries meaning for more than one of the pairings so there is some repetition.

## 3.2. Interpretive dualisms

### 3.2.1. *Instrumental – ontological*

The interpretive dualism of *instrumental – ontological* describes the space in which people manage issues of doing and being. The data shows clearly that for the great majority the mention of church brings to mind in the first instance a *Sunday – building – worship*

---

<sup>256</sup> Williams, R *The Spiritual and the Religious: Is the Territory Changing?* Third in a lecture series "Faith and Life in Britain" being given at Westminster Cathedral 17<sup>th</sup> April 2008 <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1208/the-spiritual-and-the-religious-is-the-territory-changing#sthash.J8oX3XuL.dpuf>

<sup>257</sup> Williams, R. (2008) *op cit*.

paradigm. Church is somewhere to *go*. The opening question in the interviews and focus group was simply, “Tell me about church...” Alan is a good example of a common response. *“I was born into a regular church going family (Methodist). I attended ‘Junior Church’ in the morning, Sunday School in the afternoon and later on church in the evening.”* In his teenage years he stopped going to church. The initial response is (perhaps expectedly) to talk about ‘going’ to church. James illustrates this in the negative. His mother insisted on *“no church connection until I was old enough to decide for myself”*. He describes this as not going to church. Jane described how there was no history of church attendance in her family. Contact with the church began around 14 through going to a Church Youth Fellowships Association (CYFA) group with a friend. *“I went along and thought, this is fun... a really nice group of young people where you didn’t have to pretend... genuinely nice to each other.”* She was interested to learn about Christianity, *“because I didn’t have a clue... I really had no idea”* but, *“I wasn’t really looking to make a commitment or anything.”* She made friends with some Christians at university and joined the chapel choir so much of her social and cultural life was taken up with church related people and activities. On leaving university she started attending a local Anglican church and went on an Alpha course where she had a conversion experience and *“that’s when I started proper church going.”* She married and she and her husband lived quite a nomadic life-style doing short term jobs and travelling. During that time *“we’d just go to whatever church was around.”*

As well as this individual response much of the literature aimed at outreach in the local community invites people to ‘come to church’. Church is located primarily in the building to which people go. For example, from the focus group, *“I know we’re not supposed to say it’s the building but I think it is. I mean, it’s the people as well but the building is important. It’s a reminder through the week of the people who go there.”* Another put the same sentiment differently. *“The church is the building – but the real church is the people.”*

Going to church is instrumental in a number of ways of which four stand out as most common. It is seen as a therapeutic community<sup>258</sup>. Masson argues that,

---

<sup>258</sup> The term is used by Avis, P. (1989) in *Eros and the Sacred* London: SPCK, although it also appeared as the title of Masson, J.D.’s unpublished PhD thesis *A study of the Church as a therapeutic community*, Aberdeen University, 1985.

[the] Church is called to be... a therapeutic community, whose members are coming to terms with both the brokenness and the goodness of life, and in which people may find acceptance, support and Christ's word of healing.<sup>259</sup>

Church is understood to be there to provide for the personal and social needs of its members as well as meeting specific pastoral needs at times of difficulty, crisis or celebration. It is a place to explore the self, to be valued, accepted, supported and loved – a facilitating environment which promotes wholeness and healing. It seems to be premised mainly on the understanding that wholeness for humans requires a balance between the communal and the individual, though for some it is primarily a personal and private space. Jane says, *“One of the great things about church is you don’t have to pretend to be someone else. You’re accepted by God – and hopefully by some of the congregation! I’m fairly sure I’m accepted by some of the congregation for who I am”*. Esther describes the church as a *“safe”* place. Alan, Director of Music, says what he values most about church is, *“fellowship with my senior singers... but I also get my fellowship and worship from the newly formed [music] group.”* Maggie says church is where she feels *“loved and embraced”*. In the focus group one contributor says, *“Church is a peaceful space in my life”* and another, *“church is where I find peace and quiet”*.

This therapeutic function is also there as part of the church’s mission to the wider world as well as ‘in house’ for its members. The church’s website has makes many references to the therapeutic function. It promotes the church as a place for personal development which provides *“an hospitable, intimate”* community seeking *“to recognise God in each other”* and to *“accept and welcome [people] in the same way that Christ accepts us all.”* Time and opportunity is regularly given to enable people to *“gather to enjoy each other’s company.”* There is *“time to chat and to meet with other Christians to read the Bible and discuss issues of faith.”* The audience for such material is presumably the wider, non-churched community though it also acts as reminder to church members about its nature and purpose.

Church, secondly, serves a didactic function. For the great majority of the interviewees attendance at church on Sunday is where the greater part of this teaching is to be found. ‘Preaching’ is seen primarily as teaching. Though there are some occasional study groups and courses, such as Lent groups, there is no formal, regular system for these so the Sunday

---

<sup>259</sup> Masson, J.D. (1985) *op cit.* Abstract

sermon is the main source of input. Several respondents highlighted ‘good’, ‘sound’ or ‘challenging’ teaching as something they look for in a church, though the content of that teaching varies depending on the church tradition they come from. Those from a more conservative evangelical background look for biblical exposition, thematic treatment of doctrines and devotional teaching. Jane and her husband come from a non-Anglican, evangelical background. One of the aspects of church they miss is teaching. “*We hardly ever get the same person Sunday after Sunday... there’s no continuity.*” They had found churches in York where “*we really thought we were being inspired and challenged... and we’re not getting that here.*” To remedy this she and her husband frequently go to a church in York to get some teaching which is “*absolutely on the button*” and they access sermons from that church *via* podcasts on a regular basis. Maggie is also from an evangelical background. In choosing which church to attend, “*Denomination doesn’t matter to us. What does matter is low church, local and sound teaching.*” As with Jane and her husband, Maggie often attends another church to get more ‘sound teaching’. Those from a more liberal background look less for biblical or doctrinal exposition and more for moral guidance or discussion of contemporary issues. Ellie says church teaching is there to “*keep you on the straight and narrow – stop you going off-kilter*”. Alan sees the principle purpose of sermons as giving the congregation “*spiritual guidance*”.

In the church’s literature the various study groups or courses organised on an occasional basis are also seen as an important place for teaching. For example, the Lent groups held before Easter and groups following the Church of England’s *Pilgrim* course<sup>260</sup> for those “*who want to learn more about the Christian faith*”. Other groups organised and run by individuals in the congregation happen on an *ad hoc* basis, mainly among those from an evangelical background.

The model here seems to be a largely passive one – teaching is provided by the church so the church sets the agenda. There are two notable exceptions among the interviewees. Richard and James are both avid readers of theology. Though they look to the church for teaching they do so with a critical, thoughtful eye and both express the view that no preaching/teaching is better than bad teaching/preaching. Richard says, “*I could come to*

---

<sup>260</sup> Archbishops’ Council (2013) *Pilgrim: A course for the Christian journey* Church House Publishing

*terms with a lot of forms of church but what would really scare me off is the sort of church where people tell you what to believe... what to do. It's ultimately dangerous and damaging."* James sees the liturgy and sacrament as more important than the teaching and would *"rather be with the Quakers in silence than at a bad Anglican service."* 'Bad' for him had much to do with preaching.

The third function the church is there to fulfil is kerygmatic – the proclamation of the gospel. The relationship between evangelism and mission is largely determined by the backgrounds of individuals. Whilst those from a more conservative evangelical background make more of a distinction – and would like to see more evangelism taking place – those from other backgrounds prioritise mission and are wary of evangelism. James notes that growing churches with an emphasis on evangelism are, *"largely American evangelical. It may be growing in numbers but not in value – and values. It's not my concept of a good church."*

The church literature talks about *"preaching the gospel"*. *"[The] church itself – the people – is buoyant and hopeful of keeping the rumour of God alive in our communities... [We] are busy about the business of God – worship, welcome and witness."* The church is there as *"a visible presence of the love of God"* and seeks to be *"bold in letting more people know 'The Good News'".* *"At St. Mary's Church we believe and teach that Jesus was both a man who lived a fully human life, as well as God who in rich love for all people came to rescue humanity. This is the heart of our message."*

It is clear however, as we have seen, that preaching is primarily a tool for teaching rather than proclamation. The church does not espouse evangelistic events (though some in the congregation would like it to). Evangelism is very much about personal witness and 'presence' evangelism. This 'presence' evangelism is understood as both the people and the building. *"Church is the visible community coming together for the Eucharist – coming to receive Christ – a living presence of God made visible."* 'Making God visible' lies at the heart of mission and evangelism. It is the *raison d'être* for the church. The building likewise, is seen by many as an important 'message' to the local community. As already quoted, in the focus group discussion it is stated that, *"I know we're not supposed to say [church is] the building but I think it is. I mean, it's the people as well but the building is important. It's a*

*reminder through the week of the people who go there.*" James talks of the building as a "presence" which is *"a daily reminder of the importance of faith."* It is a *"reminder that God is in every house. The dedication of one space dedicates them all."* Interestingly, James' wife is a Quaker and a number of his views show Quaker leanings in his own thinking.

In so far as the church does maintain a distinction between evangelism and mission it can be seen in the emphasis placed on pastoral care *for* and service *to* the community. The church clearly sees itself as a resource for its locality. The website says the church seeks to *"promote the Gospel"* through its mission is *"to serve the community around [it]"*. For example, it provides opportunities for *"the elderly who may be housebound"* to share in activities and *"enjoy the company of others."* Drawing on its sense of being the village and parish church it sees itself as existing to *"provide a spiritual home for all the members of our parish – young and old."* The church is there to support the village community, *"participating in the various activities in the village."* It offers *"pastoral care for the elderly, the unwell, the lonely"* through a system of visitors but it also sees the building as a resource for the local community. This is *"open during the daytime to allow people to come in for peace, quiet and reflection"*, *"the house of God for the whole parish."* It is also available as a social space and planned redevelopment of the Tower Room is intended to make this more flexible, useful and attractive.

Mission and evangelism are promoted mainly through visiting with a team of pastoral visitors covering the various parts of the village. This is linked to the Sunday intercessions which include systematic prayer for every street in the parish. *Grapevine*, the parish magazine serving all four parishes in the benefice (Dunston, Halton, Oakton and Warton), is a professionally produced publication sold on an annual subscription basis as hard copy or PDF as well as in local shops. It carries articles and information relating to the churches and to the villages and *"[as it] might be the only Christian literature that [people in the villages] receive... it is an instrument of mission in the broadest sense."*

Service is often couched in terms of hospitality. The website says St. Mary's aims to be, *"an hospitable, intimate"* community which *"seeks to recognise God in each other"* and to *"accept and welcome [people] in the same way that Christ accepts us all."* Time and opportunity is regularly offered to enable people to *"gather to enjoy each other's company."*

The family theme is regularly referred to. A regular parish lunch aims to promote the idea of the church as a *“family”* and a *“spiritual home.”* It combines a lunch served in the Tower Room (*“excellent home baking!”*) sometimes with a short informal communion service at the end. Social evenings and tea, coffee and biscuits served at most church events further push home the idea of offering a space in the village for *“getting to know one another.”* It is often stated that the purpose of such gatherings is primarily social. For example, *Grapevine* states the intention is, *“not to force anyone [to believe] but to welcome anyone interested in Jesus to spend time with us.”* There are many references in all this to *“enjoyment, fun and celebration.”*

One final instance of mission and evangelism is the occasional offices. Through *Grapevine* and in other publicity the church regularly makes known its availability at the three traditional rites of baptism, marriage and funeral. These are offered to the parish, regardless of church membership. An example from its publicity on baptism invites parents to *“bring [their children up] within the local church congregation.”* The motivation for mission and evangelism lies in a strongly articulated belief that *“[the] church is the body of Christ. It is Christ like... or it should be”*. *“It tries to represent Christ”* to its local community.

The last of the four functions which figure prominently is cultic. As already noted, the initial response to the idea of church is *‘Sunday – building – worship’*. Worship in many cases is almost synonymous with church. And although it is also an opportunity for socialising and meeting people *Sunday* most often refers to worship. Generally *Sunday* seems first to mean worship and worship mainly leads to talk about *Sunday*, though there are invitations to other times of worship during the week such as the *“intimate communion service in the Lady Chapel”* on a Wednesday.

Church is, according to the website, *“a time to meet with God spiritually”* and in worship there is the intention to create *“a sense of holiness and the presence of God.”* Given the modern Catholic tradition of the church, the Eucharist is central to the pattern of worship across the benefice. In the focus group the statement by one member that, *“Church is the visible community coming together for the Eucharist – coming to receive Christ – a living presence of God made visible”* was widely endorsed by the group. Another member, whilst agreeing with this statement, added the importance of worship as a time to *“hear”*



God. It suggests that 'meeting' God happens in different ways for different people, or though different means.

Sunday and worship figure often in the documents. People are invited to *"spend time with us on a Sunday"* and *"St. Mary's Church has something for children every Sunday"*. From the responses to a survey conducted in the parish *"Families, Community and Church"* it is noticeable that when asked about church people most often spoke about Sunday: *"I think St. Nick's is doing wonderfully! I love having the children near us just by the Lady Chapel and seeing them take part and grow up."*

Alan says, *"The Eucharist... in the Church of England is a quite deep and meaningful service and one I initially found quite strange and... intense."* Over time however it has become of central importance to him and when it is not celebrated at the main service *"I think it's slightly empty."* Similarly the use of Anglican liturgical forms is valued by some who have moved into the church from other backgrounds. *"I have started to realize that some of the traditions I experienced by going to chapel at college, like the collect for the day, just because it's been written a long time ago doesn't make it bad... songs for that matter as well... a great deal of thought has gone into these things and I have started to cherish these things more and the spur of the moment stuff less."*

Worship sits in the wider context of spirituality. The church website describes the church as a *"spiritual home"* where people who *"want to know Jesus [for themselves]"* can come and explore faith. The Annual Parochial Meeting agenda includes written reports of the various groups which operate in the church. These are written by the members or conveners of each group and give some insight into their thinking. The Evening Fellowship for example, is for *"anyone who wants to meet with other Christian, study the bible and pray together"*. The Meditation Group *"is aimed at helping members explore silent, Christian, contemplative prayer... listening for God, opening ourselves to God, waiting silently upon God."* There is recognition of a *"considerable range of denominations and traditions"*. Church is *"a time to meet with God spiritually"* and, in worship, the intention to create *"a sense of holiness and the presence of God."* All these are things the church does, the things people 'use' church for. But it is also apparent that it does these things because of what it is.

### 3.2.2. Temporal – transcendent

The second interpretive dualism I describe as the *temporal – transcendent*. Much of the talk about church obviously deals with the actual church in the village which I refer to as its temporal aspect. There are however, references to the wider church which exists in both time and space – the church universal or the church ‘triumphant’. I refer to this as its transcendent aspect in the sense that it goes beyond the here and now. Boeve raised the issue of tradition (see above pp 26-27). Tradition is as much to do with the future as with the past. It is about what is passed on to the future as well as what is inherited from the past. One of the issues of contemporary postmodern society is a level of fluidity (Bauman would refer to it as “liquid”<sup>261</sup>) which breeds a kind of existentialism focused only on the present. The idea of legacy – something bequeathed to future generations – seems strangely limited to infrastructure projects. We build a rail system ‘for the future’ but hesitate to pass on values or visions. The Christian gospel speaks of the past and the present but also of God’s future, which is both temporal and eternal.

As with talk about the functions of church there is a strongly pragmatic element. The *idea* which comes to mind first in talk of church is the building and people of the local church. Indeed, ‘local’ is a very strong feature in the data. David exemplifies this: *“In each residential community we attended the local church. We’ve always looked for a church at the heart of the community.”* Ellie values worshipping with, *“the people I meet around the village. It gives me a great sense of belonging.”* Richard takes this in a denominational direction. He values the parochial system of the Church of England and has always (*“so far”*) gone to his parish church wherever he has lived. *“It’s my local church, the community of people where I am.”* This extends to holidays in the UK. On Sunday he will go to the nearest Anglican church where he has a strong sense of belonging. *“I feel as if it’s mine, it’s familiar and it’s part of the same thing...”* Stephen likewise has a strong Anglican allegiance. *“If I moved I would only look for an Anglican church... it’s local in a sense.”* Jane says, *“If we were in the city centre and this was one of 20 churches we could easily access we wouldn’t be going to this one... but we’re in a village and this is the village church and it’s the community and we see the same people there as I meet in the playground... or I see down the road and I think that’s really important.”*

---

<sup>261</sup> Bauman, Z. (2005) *op. cit.*

What is interesting about this sense of the local is that it also carries the idea of transcendence. If the functional focuses on what the church 'does for me' in an individualistic sense, the local church takes people beyond themselves and sees the church as a community of believers. The denominational idea takes this further and points to an awareness of a wider, world-wide (or at least nationwide) community of communities. That sense of the wider church is however not limited to denomination. Indeed, for some denomination does not matter. James describes himself as *"an Anglican by sheer accident"* and Maggie is clear that, for her and her husband, *"denomination doesn't matter"*. What is present is a strong sense that the church is an international body and *this* church is part of something much bigger, be it the Anglican Communion or other expressions of church elsewhere.

The church website acknowledges that Dunston, being a village church, has a congregation which, *"comes from a considerable range of denominations and traditions."* A number of its members previously attended other denominations as well as non-denominational churches. Interestingly several of those interviewed referred to this and to a growing appreciation of Anglicanism. The following comments have already been quoted but here I want to draw out this denominational aspect as it is important for the discussion in Chapter Four. Jane says she and her husband struggled with traditional Anglican practices to begin with. *"I think the fact that so much of the services are based on tradition rather than what God is doing now in this place... erm... there are services where we start to lose the will live after 45 minutes."* This is changing however. *"I have started to realize that some of the traditions I experienced by going to chapel at college, the collect for the day, just because it's been written a long time ago doesn't make it bad... songs for that matter as well... a great deal of thought has gone into these things and I have started to cherish these things more and the spur of the moment stuff less."* Alan, brought up a Methodist, has over the years come to appreciate much about the Anglican liturgy. An occasional feature of the Sunday morning service – often commented on appreciatively – is a 'commentary' on the Anglican liturgy. The various parts of the service are briefly explained by a member of the congregation, highlighting their origins and significance. Alan again: *"The Eucharist... in the Church of England is a quite deep and meaningful service and one I initially found quite*

*strange and... intense.*" Over time however it has become of central importance to him and when it is not celebrated at the main service *"I think it's slightly empty."*

We can add into the question of the temporal the idea of contemporary. As is to be expected, views on such things as contemporary music or liturgy vary. Comments from a survey carried out by the PCC include, *"I think it is important to include good thoughtful modern music e.g. John Bell's, but my preference for traditional music is because so much modern stuff is too lightweight or downright drivel."* *"Dumbing down should not be a feature. There is already too much pick-and-mix in society."* The opposing view is expressed by Jane: *"I think the fact that so much of the services are based on tradition rather than what God is doing now in this place... erm... there are services where we start to lose the will live after 45 minutes."*

Having a church building which dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century and is grade 2\* listed has an impact on several members. It is almost universally loved as a space though there is frequent acknowledgment that it is a serious financial commitment. Most seem happy to accept this given its beauty, ambience and what it signifies. There are also plans to extend the modern narthex to make it more usable by the wider community. It has a number of important historical and architectural features, such as the stained glass around the church which is of a high standard and of various ages. In 2007 it was found that the East wall and window were in need of serious repair and the decision was taken to commission a new window. This was the work of Bayley Studios, Dunston, a nationally recognised conservation and design company. The artist Helen Whittaker created the new window which was installed in 2009. It is a dramatic representation of the crucifixion and provides an arresting focal point in sympathy with the historic architecture but in a contemporary style. Significantly some of the children from the local school were used as models for figures in the crowd. It continues to be talked about today. Ellie (the youngest interviewee in her early 20s) adds one interesting comment. She speaks of the building as a, *"special place, a holy place"* but adds that the churchyard also matters. Her grandparents are buried there and it gives her a strong sense that in some way, *"they are still there at the church."* Given the increasing trend towards more diverse places for remembering the deceased and the rapidly declining use of local churchyards her comment stands out as an example of a strong sense of both the temporal and the transcendent.

### 3.2.3. Patron - subscriber

The third interpretive dualism is Williams' *patron – subscriber*. It questions the extent to which, in Williams' words, "we reserve our liberty in regard to our various affiliations rather than committing ourselves to regular and unquestioning support"<sup>262</sup>. This is of particular importance given Volf's argument we looked at earlier concerning, "the tendencies toward individualism in Protestant ecclesiology"<sup>263</sup>. Subscribers mainly locate authority and expertise in the institution with a reticence about their own views, attitudes or opinions: power tends to rest with the institution (the party line). Patrons on the other hand, give more weight to their own views at the expense of the institution: power shifts to the individual (the personal faith). They illustrate the 'It belongs to me'/'I belong to it' dynamic. To some extent this has already been present in some of the data examined. In the *instrumental – ontological* pairing, for example, many of the functions related to personal preferences suggesting an individual choice.

From the ethnography a number of behaviours are apparent which suggest personal choice driving decisions around attendance. The pattern of Sunday worship in the church is determined by a number of factors. St. Mary's is one church in a benefice of four served by a full-time Rector and Curate, a part-time priest and two Readers. Services are timed in each place to allow the Rector to be present in all four churches every month and St. Mary's (the largest) twice a month. When there are five Sundays in the month the churches take it in turns to host a benefice Eucharist at which the Rector presides and preaches and there are no services in the other churches. Given the modern Catholic tradition of the parish the Eucharist is central to Sunday worship but in order to further ease the pressure on the clergy always being present a non-Eucharistic service takes place on the second Sunday of the month at St. Mary's and this is structured by the Worship Team and lay led. On such Sundays there is an 8.00am celebration of Communion so that there is always a Eucharist at some time on Sunday in the benefice. On the first and fourth Sundays there is provision made for children's activities in the Tower Room during part of the service. The resultant pattern for St. Mary's is:

First Sunday:	8.00am	Holy Communion
	10.30am	Holy Communion (plus crèche/children's activities)

---

<sup>262</sup> Williams, R. (2008) *op cit.*

<sup>263</sup> Volf, M (1998) *op. cit.* p2

	4.00pm	Family Service (non-Eucharistic)
Second Sunday	8.00am	Holy Communion
	10.30am	Morning Worship (non-Eucharistic)
Third Sunday	8.00am	Holy Communion
	10.30am	All-age Holy Communion
Fourth Sunday	8.00am	Holy Communion
	10.30am	Holy Communion (plus crèche/children's activities)
Fifth Sunday	10.30am	Holy Communion (Benefice Service: rotated venues)

The 8.00am Holy Communion Service has a regular congregation averaging 20, the majority of whom only attend that service. The figures in the church's service register show that the 4.00pm Family Service on the first Sunday attracts between 25 and 40 including the children and young people. The service is organised and led by a small group of younger members of the church, mainly couples with children. Including its leaders around 10 also attend other services but the remainder only attend the Family Service. The language around the services is noteworthy. There is a common assumption, betrayed in conversations that the 10.30am service is 'the main service' and the others are in some way supplementary. In fact, many who go to the 4.00pm Family Service on the first Sunday regard that as their 'main service' and is the only service they attend. This suggests there are at least three 'congregations' in the church, some of whom rarely, if ever, meet the others.

Attendance at the 10.30am Holy Communion service on the first and third Sundays averages between 70 and 80, the highest of the monthly figures. On these Sundays most of the regular members are present. At the non-Eucharistic service on the second Sunday the average drops to around 50 and at the All-age Eucharist on the third Sunday the average again drops to around 60. In these cases there is also a change in the make-up of the congregation. There are some 'regular' members who do not attend on the second Sunday as it is non-Eucharistic and on the third Sunday, though fewer absent themselves they are partially replaced by others with children who always come on that Sunday. On the fifth Sunday the behaviour is more complex. When the benefice service is in Dunston the average of 70/80 is supplemented by around 10 to 20. (The regular congregations at the other churches in the benefice are small. In two cases they are in single figures and the other rarely exceeds 12.) When the service is at another church in the benefice a maximum of about 30 of the regular Dunston congregation attend.

The strong link between St. Mary's and the village means that it is also used fairly frequently for the occasional offices. There is still a strong sense in the village that it is 'their' church so weddings, baptisms and funerals of those who do not regularly attend church are relatively common. The policy on baptisms is that they are held during the main service on any Sunday by negotiation between the Rector and the family. On Sundays where a baptism takes place there are significant changes in the attendance figures. The number of regular members drops significantly from around 70/80 to about 50 but this is then supplemented by the family of the child or children to be baptized and this can vary considerably. On several such Sundays 'visitors' outnumber the regulars.

The pattern described above leads to the obvious question of what the regulars who do not attend on any given Sunday do and why. The answer to that falls into one of three options. They either: miss altogether and do not attend church that day; go to the 8.00am service; go elsewhere. The evidence is anecdotal gathered from informal conversations. With regard to Sundays when there is a baptism approximately 30 regulars do not attend. Attendance at the 8.00am service (if there is one) on such Sundays rises by around half a dozen. About six regularly go to other churches (in York) and the rest appear to go nowhere. If there is no 8.00am service the majority go nowhere.

For Sundays when there is no baptism the following grid illustrates the behaviours.

Week	Service		Attendance
First Sunday:	8.00am	Holy Communion	
	10.30am	Holy Communion (plus crèche/children's activities)	
	4.00pm	Family Service (non-Eucharistic)	
Second Sunday	8.00am	Holy Communion	
	10.30am	Morning Worship (non-Eucharistic)	Do not attend church that day (c.10); go to the 8.00am service (c.4); go elsewhere (c.6)
Third Sunday	8.00am	Holy Communion	
	10.30am	All-age Holy Communion	Do not attend church that day (c.8); go to the 8.00am service (c.4); go elsewhere (c.6)
Fourth Sunday	8.00am	Holy Communion	
	10.30am	Holy Communion (plus crèche/children's activities)	

Fifth Sunday	10.30am	Holy Communion (Benefice Service: rotated venues)	Do not attend church that day(c.20); go elsewhere (c.6)
--------------	---------	---	---

We can see personal choice coming out in such behaviour. Comments around this behaviour included, *"I prefer the more formal worship with hymns, choir and communion. I am less comfortable with informal services so give it a miss on the second Sunday."* (The second Sunday is a lay-led, non-Eucharistic service) *"I don't like baptism services where so many people don't seem to know what they're doing, don't come to church. I find it uncomfortable."* Another said, *"I dislike services where people are constantly wandering in and out so go to the 8 o'clock."* A clearer expression of personal choice is, *"The all-age Eucharist does nothing for me. We go and get some real high church worship in York!"*

As we saw in the *instrumental – ontological*, whilst there is considerable loyalty to the local church, any perceived 'shortfall' is dealt with by supplementary activity. This is often based on an 'idealised' congregation elsewhere and one assumes if circumstances were different that the other church would be the preferred option all the time. The ecclesiastical grass is greener elsewhere! There is clearly a balancing act going on. So long as overall this church meets an individual's tastes and requirements they are happy to manage this by the use of supplementary (or idealized) churches. But in the interviews we addressed the question of such stress points, particularly asking at what point the balance would be tipped in favour of leaving. Richard notes the differences and can manage them most of the time. *"Church is a platform for saying what I believe. You don't know what others believe – for example, when you say the creed... If we talked about beliefs (which we don't!) I guess we'd disagree! If you pin it down to beliefs and attitudes you start to fragment people in a way that's not helpful. But he goes on to say," But there are times when the wider Anglican church, especially the Church of England, has "at its worst" taken decisions or more often not taken decisions which have made my friends challenge my belonging to it. When a non-Christian or non-Anglican friend asks "Can you defend this?" well, I say "No. I can't" and there have been times on issues where I get close to saying I will have to leave."*

But is this sufficient to argue for a patron rather than a subscriber approach? The issue is complex. The stated views and some of the behaviours suggest there is a tendency towards affiliation rather than regular and unquestioning support. There appears to be awareness there has to be compromise. Personal preferences regarding, for example, the



style or form of worship, does drive some of the behaviour. *“I like the peaceful atmosphere of the 8 o’clock service with no distractions”* and as we have seen from the attendance patterns ‘church’ means for most the actual congregation they identify with. This is more complex than just the three (8.00am; 10.30am; 4.00pm) It also includes the week by week types of service in the monthly pattern of worship. It can also be seen that there are examples of attitudes and deeds not quite matching each other. One participant argued that, *“There is already too much pick-and-mix in society”* but, paradoxically, this comment was from someone who chooses not to go to the all-age worship or non-Eucharistic service and goes elsewhere on such Sundays.

This suggests Williams’ pathology is present in a selective way. Loyalty to the local church (subscriber) is strong among the participants and in the focus group. They speak of it as *“their”* church with affection and pride. This is not to say they do not sometimes criticize St Mary’s – it would be a rare example if they did not! Some do however betray something of a ‘patron’ attitude by attending other churches when the form, style or location of a particular Sunday service is less to their liking. Those other churches seem to be chosen as representing a better church or one substantially more in line with their tastes. In addition to this some members ‘supplement’ their membership at St Mary’s by attending another church on occasions whilst maintaining regular attendance at their home church. As there is no evening service in the parish some attend a major charismatic church in York. Another form of ‘supplementing’ is by accessing podcasts, on-line resources and fellowship groups run by other churches. In all these cases if the ‘other’ church was more accessible then the members would consider changing allegiance.

### *Excursus 3: Ordinary ecclesiologies*

I have noted that ordinary ecclesiology operates in both the singular and the plural: there are the ecclesiologies of the individuals and the ecclesiology of the congregation. This latter phrase can also be stated in the plural – *ecclesiologies* of the congregation. Individuals are drawn to specific churches because of the tradition it represents but where there is limited choice of which church to attend individuals are faced with some negotiation or compromise. It is possible to detect differing schools of thought within the congregation, manifest in the behaviours described above.

Ecclesial practice and ecclesial reflection are sometimes distinct but more usually they operate together. In both cases we start by looking at the differing voices which shape or inform these practices and ideas. Using Cameron's typology again the formal voice is rarely in evidence in the ecclesial thinking of ordinary members, at least overtly. Two of the participants are individually drawn to reading theology though both admitted this was personally driven and not in any way systematic. The content of their reading is determined by current debate, contentious issues or 'newsworthy' publications (e.g. Dawkins' *The God Delusion*). For the rest there is no conscious engagement with the formal voice: indeed, there is frequent reference to being unschooled or even uninterested in 'theology'. This persisted in the focus group where again there is little engagement with or interest in theology.

This would suggest their ecclesiology is not shaped by formal theology. We do however need to note that formal theology 'gets in' in more covert ways for some at least. For example, those on the PCC or serving on the various working parties convened for specific projects are often exposed to documents and policies which contain formal theological reflection. The church's *Mission Statement* contains theological statements and arguments for example. We must assume that this voice does enter into the thinking of the members but it appears if it does so this is at a largely unconscious level.

There is also the issue of the preaching and teaching that goes on week by week. Much of that is informed by formal theology though it is rarely described as such and probably even less received as such. The formal voice is not totally absent but it is muted.

The normative voice which speaks through denomination and tradition is more in evidence. There is clearly substantial (one might say subliminal) exposure to this through the liturgy and in the church's publicity. References are frequently made to the Anglican tradition and identity of the church and the one-to-one conversations clearly showed awareness of this. This largely operates as a given and though sometimes as we have seen there is, for example, commentary on the Anglican liturgy this happens only occasionally. Most are aware this is an Anglican church, but what they think that means is less evident. Some *apologia* for the normative voice is articulated in material such as publicity or *Grapevine* but the amount which is consciously accessed by the members seems limited.

Unlike the formal voice the normative voice is more apparent but is still remains somewhat muted.

The voice of the ordinary church member is clearly in evidence as that was one of the main objectives of the study. But there are important observations to make about it. The first is that it is individual. That is to say, even in the focus group there is a tendency to talk about “What I think” and little or no evidence of “what we think”. In the documentary evidence ‘we’ is used frequently but the extent to which the individuals in the congregation identify with, or think first of, this collective identity is questionable. It might be thought that the form the research took of using one-to-one conversations would explain or even prompt this, but the focus group manifested the same point. Although it was a collective discussion and talked about collective ideas, ‘we’ was rarely the pronoun of choice.

Following on from that, we can also see that the ordinary voice is largely private and unanticipated. It is private in the sense that the response to being interviewed individually and to being part of the group discussion was commonly a comment along the lines of “I’ve never been asked about that”. It suggests people do a considerable amount of thinking but are reticent – or denied the opportunity – to take it anywhere. It is unanticipated in that there appears to be no expectation that people will engage in any theological thinking. People do not very often if at all talk much about theological ideas. They may talk about experiences and even policies or practices in the church but they do not appear to do so within any kind of theological framework. It suggests that whereas the formal and normative voices are muted through lack of engagement the ordinary voice is muted through lack of opportunity or context.

In considering the content of ordinary ecclesiology we can summarize the findings using the interpretive dualisms. There is, as one might expect, a preoccupation with the instrumental. Church is something you do, somewhere you go. It is about people, a building, a place for fellowship, teaching, worship and the like. This is more or less communal depending on the individual. For some it is primarily a private activity done at the same time as others are doing it; for others it is primarily a gathering. Talk about what the church *is* comes later and particularly in a group context. In the focus group, though there was still an emphasis on functions – the church as a resource – there were more references to its ontological reality. It could be argued that if the question posed to individuals had been “what do you think the church is?” then the ontological reality of it would have been

articulated more clearly. Using the more general introduction of, “Tell me about church” allowed the respondent to start where they chose. And that is almost always functional. When we look at the literature there is a much more marked ontological emphasis. The church is part of a wider family (Anglican and beyond); the church is part of an on-going story (it has traditions and predecessors); the church is the Body of Christ. The distinction we can observe here however is that where the literature had a strong sense of what *this* church is, the focus group did not display a marked collective awareness of its identity. ‘The church’ in this context was spoken of as a kind of third party, something external to the local context. The sense that this church has a particular or clearly articulated ecclesiology seems to be absent. Any such local ecclesiology and any link articulated between the local and the universal, invisible, transcendent was made almost wholly – and only – in the official documents of the church.

As the normative voice is more in evidence it follows that there is more balance between the temporal and the transcendent. Initial responses in the interviews shows the focus is on the here and now, the church in its present context and very much on its local identity. There is however an awareness of the church over time and place. The building has much to do with this, being an ancient structure with all that that connotes. But there are also constant reminders through, for example the intercessions. The church across the world and the ‘church triumphant’ in the form of marking the anniversaries of the deceased are weekly features of the liturgy.

As for the tendency to adopt a *patron* rather than a *subscriber* approach to belonging to an institution the evidence does not seem to support this in a clear cut sense. Nor is it something new: there are examples in the church’s not too distant past of those who have left the church to find a more conducive place to belong.<sup>264</sup> The evidence shows that there is verbal assent to the individual’s freedom to hold more lightly to the institution but on the whole they stay. If this shift is manifested at all it lies in the behaviour of multiple belonging (attending more than one church) or supplementing belonging one church by accessing the resources of another. The one issue in which there appears to be more of a *patron* than a *subscriber* approach is that of denomination. Only a minority of the participants interviewed would appear to think of themselves as ‘paid up’ Anglicans.

---

<sup>264</sup> Reasons for leaving include the ordination of women, changes in the patterns of worship – and even the re-siting of the jigsaw clubs resources!

## 4. Outcomes: Reflection and discussion

### 4.1. “What on earth is the church for?”

This question, used to launch the research project in the church, can be put as “What on earth is the church (for)? Bracketing the last word emphasises the distinct but related questions of nature and purpose. The autoethnography, literature and fieldwork each contribute something to answering the question in this form. The autoethnography shows how an ecclesiology develops. Church began for me as a place to go, something to do, somewhere to belong. It began with the pragmatic and practical and, over time it evolved into something more reflective. It was fed with a combination of experience and socialisation in the church as well as professional training as a priest. To its functional or instrumental nature therefore was added a deepening understanding of its ontological reality. The literature suggests a movement in almost the opposite direction. Early attention to the church church’s ontological reality has shifted to an increased interest in the church’s visible, concrete reality in the form of the local church. Whilst the ontological has not disappeared – and still forms a major part of such writing – there is much greater concern about how the church looks and what it does in practice.

The fieldwork demonstrates something of both these. The conversations and interviews mirror the autoethnography in that church is thought of essentially in pragmatic, practical terms. Practice is however reflected on over time so that the instrumental is enriched by the ontological. This is not demonstrated in every case and I would suggest that the instrumental is still more in evidence than the ontological, but the ontological is present. The documentary evidence from the local church indicates a balance between the two. Inevitably much of this material is very practical. It gives information about times and places for meetings, events, services. There is however a significant amount of explanation about such meetings or events. Explaining why these things are happening suggests an underpinning ontological perspective – the church doing things because of what the church is.

This is replicated in the case of the *temporal – transcendent*. My experience along with that of the participants shows how the temporal, ‘here and now’ of the church acquires an understanding of its more transcendent nature. Awareness of the church in other places

and the church in the hereafter develops with time (age?) and experience. Again, the literature appears to move in the opposite direction as might be expected. An example, not reviewed in the literature but illustrative of this point, is liberation theology. One of its espoused aims is to shift attention from the hereafter to the here and now.

The *patron – subscriber* binary is more complex. The autoethnography and the interviews suggest that whilst there may be a shift in the dynamics of the relationship between individuals and institutions this may be more in attitude than practice. People, though they may become more questioning and critical of the organisations they belong to, do not easily shift allegiance. Whether this is loyalty or inertia has not been investigated in this study. The aspect of this which the literature picks up is that of individualism. Being a patron rather than a subscriber suggests a higher value is placed on the individual's perspective, beliefs or values and some of the literature surveyed does discuss the negative implications of this for the church. The significance of this I suggest is subtle. I will argue in a moment that much of the ordinary theology which goes on is personal if not private. If that is the case then linked to an increasing individualism it has important implications.

The data has identified two sources of theology in the church. There is that which Cameron (above p20) calls the formal and normative voices – the theology of professionals in academy and church and there is the theology of the operant and espoused voices – that of the non-professional, often lay, members of the church. The latter is broadly understood as ordinary theology. The preliminary conclusion I draw from this study is that ordinary theology tends to be personal if not private and is largely unacknowledged. Furthermore, it is only in rare cases or indirectly that it accesses 'professional' theology as a resource. I turn now therefore to reconsider ordinary theology and the role of the local church.

## 4.2.Re-thinking ordinary theology

Astley's definition of ordinary theology as, "the God-talk of those believers who have received no scholarly theological education"<sup>265</sup> (see above p46) implies it is the theology of the people, usually lay people. By coining that phrase Astley (and others who have followed his lead) has rightly tapped into a rich resource of theological thinking in the church. The

---

<sup>265</sup> Astley J (2002) *Ordinary Theology* Aldershot: Ashgate p1

question remains about its purpose and status. It could be seen as a means to root out heresy by uncovering the (mis)understandings of the laity thereby allowing the church to set the syllabus for discipleship education to safeguard orthodoxy. This could be one outcome but it is by no means the main intention – and indeed the converse could be the case. The history of Christianity has several examples of the voice of the people challenging the voice of authority! It could be seen as secondary or derivative in relation to *extraordinary* or ‘official’ theologies. It could be viewed, in a world where the popular voice has greater power, as the authentic voice of the people and therefore somehow more relevant, authoritative or real in today’s more egalitarian, democratised world. Ammerman (see above p45) argues that the experience of non-experts should be “privileged” (her term) but this is counter-productive<sup>266</sup>. On what grounds this should happen is open to question. At its worst it simply replaces one privileged voice with another. None of these views is helpful. Rather than thinking of ordinary theology in terms of a partisan constituency it needs to be thought of in terms of its essential nature. It is the ‘meaning making’<sup>267</sup> of Christians. It is how they make sense of what they believe, how they articulate (to themselves at least) their faith. It is heuristic,

a way of being informed, a way of knowing. Whatever presents itself in the consciousness... as perception, sense, intuition or knowledge represents an invitation for further elucidation...<sup>268</sup>

In this sense it is no different from other forms of theology as all theology starts with experience. The Christian gospel is initiated by the Incarnation and the church begins with encounters with Jesus. The gospel narratives are themselves ordinary theology – attempts to make sense of Christ’s presence. Seen in this way ordinary theology ceases to be about *who* does it, but rather, broadens it into a description of all theology. This has one particular advantage for this study. I noted in the data gathering that some of those interviewed read a considerable amount of theology. Their lack of scholarly training in theology would put them in the ordinary theologian category but their level of sophisticated thinking at the same time takes them out of it. Likewise, I (or the Rector and Readers in the benefice)

---

<sup>266</sup> Astley, it must be said, does not make such an assertion in his argument for ordinary theology.

<sup>267</sup> The phrase was coined in psychology by Victor Frankl in his 1946 book *Man’s Search for Meaning*

<sup>268</sup> Moustakas C (1990) *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications* London: Sage p10

cannot be described as an ordinary theologian in Astley's way as I am a priest and was a lecturer in theology. Yet as a Christian I do as ordinary theologians do. I try to make sense of experiences, the things that happen to me and that happen in the world. I have resources from my professions to draw on, but they provide a quantitative rather than a qualitative difference. I am an ordinary theologian.

Doing theology is fundamentally an apologetic task. It is the necessary articulation of the faith Christians hold, the means whereby they give a reason for the hope they hold (1 Peter 3:15). Theology takes us beyond the experience into its meaning and significance. As TS Eliot would have it, without reflection we run the risk of having the experience but missing the meaning (*The Four Quartets: Dry Salvages II*). Boeve suggests we are living in an age where experiences are viewed as a kind of commodity, increasingly sought for their own end. He describes it as, "the culture of the kick... a moment of self-consolidation, a here-and-now endeavour to obtain assurance amidst insecurity and stability amongst instability."<sup>269</sup> That 'moment of self-consolidation' betrays an important shift. It suggests the experience is sufficient on its own which is what Boeve challenges. Experiences matter, but on their own they can simply become existential moments of no lasting significance. They become significant, more lasting and more powerful for being understood. Theology is about understanding the meaning of the experience such that its full import is grasped. Indeed, I will go further. In Christian faith experience is simply a starter motor, not the engine. The experience of encountering God in Christ leads to (or should) a whole new conceptual framework for life. That is, as Davison puts it,

To acknowledge that there is a God, and that God created all things is more than to add an additional item of information to the list of propositions we understand to be true... It changes the way in which you understand everything. The Christian faith is therefore not so many intellectual propositions; it is a different way to think<sup>270</sup>.

To change the way everything is understood is more than just an intellectual shift, a change of mind. It is a paradigm shift which does not simply *include* God in the picture: God becomes the lens through which everything is seen, known and understood. As a result things are seen differently. Elaine Graham traces a new understanding of apologetics which,

---

<sup>269</sup> Boeve, L. (2002) *op cit* p87

<sup>270</sup> Davison A (2011) *Imaginative Apologetics* London: SCM p12



[displaces] a modernist cognitive approach [which] emphasizes the priority of assent to propositional truths, and [posits] the object of apologetics as an invitation to participate in a way of life.”<sup>271</sup>

Millbank defines apologetics – *apologia* – as an argument but also as a narrative which, “if it attempts to be detached, this is only because it springs from the most authentic heart of interior commitment.”<sup>272</sup> I take him to mean by detachment that reflection on experience requires some form of ‘othering’ of the self or distance from the experience in order to ‘see’ it clearly. This is the same task required in autoethnography and autobiography where the individual seeks to stand back from their own life and see it objectively and discern its patterns and significance. The detachment is not disembodiment or divorce but is driven by the interior commitment to a greater understanding of experience. Seeing detachment in this way makes it possible to bring Graham’s ‘participation in a way of life’ and Millbank’s ‘narrative’ together by reflecting on the use of ‘truth’. *ἀληθεια* in the New Testament carries the sense of ‘to unhide’ – it is performative as well as propositional. That which is false is in some way a masking, a deceiving or a misleading. That which is true by contrast reveals, opens, manifests. If we understand truth in this sense we can see how it opens up the reading of John 14: 6, “I am the way and the truth and the life.” A way is followed; life is lived; truth is performed. This is not to say truth has no propositional element. Indeed, all three need explaining – an *apologia* – but they only make sense if that explanation is grounded in practice. Graham’s idea of apologetics as ‘an invitation to participate in a way of life’ foregrounds participation but it does not do away with the cognitive.

Barth is reputed to have said that a Christian who says “I am no theologian” is not demonstrating modesty but indolence. We may not express this with such directness but it is the case that to be a Christian is to be a theologian, however haltingly or lacking in sophistication. Frederica Thompson rebuts “I am no theologian” robustly. She describes theology as, “a *people’s* understanding of God, humanity, and the world.”(my italics)<sup>273</sup> She goes on, “We mislead ourselves, as well as others, when we forget to pay attention to the theological foundations of our faith.”<sup>274</sup> Theology is the task of every Christian, the *λαος* of God, the whole people of God. All its members are called upon to articulate and explore

---

<sup>271</sup> Graham, E. (2013) *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* London: SCM p143ff

<sup>272</sup> Davison A (2011) *op. cit.* pxiv

<sup>273</sup> Thompson, F.H. (2004) *We Are Theologians* New York: Seabury Books p55

<sup>274</sup> Thompson, F.H. (2004) *ibid* p58

their faith “cheerfully, prayerfully and in gratitude, to bring [their] lives into correspondence with [the] Lord”<sup>275</sup>. ‘Ordinary’ Christians cannot abdicate responsibility for doing theology nor can ‘experts’ claim it as the domain of an elite few<sup>276</sup>. By introducing the idea of the *λαος* of God I am arguing for an understanding of “the *laity* of all believers” rather than “the *priesthood* of all believers” (cf. 1 Peter 2: 5) to underpin what it means to be Christian. The latter implies bringing people up to some superior level; the former reminds us that there is no hierarchy in the church.

This also draws attention to the critically important fact that the church is the *people* of God not the *persons* of God. Christian faith, I suggest, is about joining a community not a queue. (If it is a queue then it is the queue at the turnstile that lets one into the stadium to join the crowd rather than the queue at the supermarket checkout.) That is to say, though salvation is for the individual and is appropriated by the individual it is about more than the individual. Human being in the Christian faith is about the individual *in community*. Personhood comes about through being part of a community. Just as the Persons of the Trinity receive and maintain their,

identities through relation, and relations of a certain quality, then so would human persons only receive and maintain their identities through relation with others and would stand fully in the image of God whenever these identities and relations achieved a certain quality.<sup>277</sup>

Further, salvation is not for personal reward or a private benefit. The gospel imperative is to “go and tell” of an encounter, an experience of God in Christ, which is radically transforming (see for example, Mk. 16: 15; Mtt. 28: 19; Acts 1: 8) and is for the whole world. As being a Christian is an individual and communal existence, so theology must also be a collective as well as an individual task. The individual must necessarily process and reflect upon experience to discover its meaning and thereby learn to be more fully human but it does not end there. Each story is part of that bigger Gospel story. The community needs the stories of the individuals just as the individuals need the stories of the community. Herein

---

<sup>275</sup> Healey, N.M. *Ordinary Theology, Theological Method and Constructive Ecclesiology* in Astely, J. and Francis, L. (Eds.) (2013) *Exploring Ordinary Theology* London: Routledge pp 13-22

<sup>276</sup> As Cardinal Newman did in the first of The Tracts for the Times *Thoughts on the Ministerial Commission, Respectfully Addressed to the Clergy* in 1833 when he asked if, “any greater evil [can] befall Christians than their teachers... be guided by them instead of guiding?”

<sup>277</sup> McFadyen, A.I. (1990) *The Call to Personhood* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p31

lies a proper orthodoxy whereby my experience is checked and balanced by others and my experience is a resource for others in the same way.

The problem appears to be that theology is fragmented, or rather dispersed. Veling<sup>278</sup> says that practical theology,

is not a branch of theology but rather ...an attempt to heal [the] fragmentation of theology, such that it resists being slotted into yet another theological speciality. [It is] more 'verb-like' than 'noun-like'.<sup>279</sup>

I argue that the same should be said of ordinary theology. Indeed, bringing the two together as the same thing gives them a new creative power. Somehow theology needs to move beyond its fragmented descriptors into a place where a more holistic view of its nature and purpose resides.

The level of sophistication and the resources deployed vary enormously but we need to recover the simple fact that living by faith is theology. It may be enhanced by 'professionals' but it is not dependent upon them. It went on before they were recognised as such. I suggest it is possible to reframe this understanding of theology by thinking in particular of practical theology as a search for wisdom which John Swinton defines as, "a special kind of reflection or deliberation (perhaps along the lines of Aristotle's *phronesis*, or practical wisdom"<sup>280</sup> which informs and shapes practice. As Swinton argues, wisdom is, "more than knowledge."<sup>281</sup> It is, "the process of accumulating knowledge, experience and intuitive understanding over a lifetime. And developing the capacity to apply such things within a life that one considers to be well lived."<sup>282</sup> Something similar lies behind scriptural reasoning developed by David Ford as a means of inter-faith dialogue. Stephen Kepnes says,

practitioners believe they need to find a form of reason that is neither abstract nor purely utilitarian, but is a reasoning of the heart... that... might be best expressed simply as "wisdom."<sup>283</sup>

---

<sup>278</sup> Veling T.A. (2005) *Practical Theology "On Earth as it is in Heaven"* Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books

<sup>279</sup> Veling T.A. (2005) *op. cit.* p3

<sup>280</sup> Bondi, L., Carr, D., Clark, C. & Clegg, C. (2011) *Towards Professional Wisdom: Practical Deliberation in the People Professions* Farnham: Ashgate Publishing p4

<sup>281</sup> Bondi, L., Carr, D., Clark, C. & Clegg, C. (2011) *op. cit.* p155

<sup>282</sup> Bondi, L., Carr, D., Clark, C. & Clegg, C. (2011) *op. cit.* p155

<sup>283</sup> Ford, D.F., & Pecknold, C.C. (2006) *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning* Oxford: Blackwell p29

Practical theology can be seen as Christianity's wisdom tradition. The wisdom tradition of the Old Testament has the same two distinct elements which we see in practical theology and which are inextricably linked. It has the reflective aspect which seek insight and understanding, and the practical aspect focused on skill and ability. If we have detected an underlying problem for the church in the preceding discussions it is that theology has at times become divorced from practice. When it becomes only philosophical speculation it loses touch with its primary context and purpose. The link between reflection and practice is central to both Judaism and Christianity which are incarnational faiths. The abstract is made concrete; the invisible is made visible; the transcendent is made temporal. And each statement is reversible.

To return to Swinton, his comment above is taken from a volume on *professional* wisdom which he defines as relating to,

the accumulated body of authoritative, historical, reflective and practical knowledge that is gained by a profession over time and which guides it in the development of its theoretical and practical activities.<sup>284</sup>

This study is a piece of practical theology undertaken, ostensibly, by a 'professional'. I have already discussed in the autoethnography some discomfiture with the idea of professionalism. There is some irony in the fact that *profession* was originally used of the vows made by one entering a religious order. Even more ironic is that it is now used almost as the opposite of *amateur* – the one passionate about something. But Swinton's definition does not require a 'professional' in the sense we discussed earlier. We can adapt his definition powerfully by replacing 'a profession' with 'church': *the accumulated body of authoritative, historical, reflective and practical knowledge that is gained by the church over time and which guides it in the development of its theoretical and practical activities*. In doing so it becomes a definition of practical theology. If ordinary theology is the task of the whole church it leads on to the question of where that theology is done, including and beyond the individual Christian. This brings the local church to the centre of the argument.

#### 4.3.Re-thinking local church

---

<sup>284</sup> Bondi, L., Carr, D., Clark, C. & Clegg, C. (2011) *op. cit.* p155

When Hauerwas says, “all theology must begin and end with ecclesiology” (see above p24) he asserts that without the church there is no gospel and without the gospel there is no church. Church is not an idea but a concrete reality. As a universal phenomenon it transcends any one place as a series of local manifestations, united in the gospel but dispersed around the world. Behind Hauerwas’ statement lie several reasons why ecclesiology is of such central importance. Three are of particular significance for this study.

The first draws on Volf’s trinitarian underpinning of church.

Because the triune God is not a private entity, one cannot create a private fellowship with this God. Fellowship with the triune God *is* therefore at once also fellowship with all other human beings who in faith have surrendered their existence to the same God. Trinitarian faith accordingly means becoming a community. (original emphasis)<sup>285</sup>

Coming to faith involves entering a pre-existing community, of all other Christians but ultimately of God’s own (Trinitarian) self. One does not become a Christian and *then* join the church, though one will (should) go on to join *a* church. The church on earth is an anticipation of the community which will be realized at the eschaton. The fulfilment of the gospel is that perfect community which as yet lies beyond time and space. Following on from this ecclesiology is central therefore because of what the church on earth demonstrates. Congregating is a performative apologetic. The visible gathering of Christians, for worship in particular, witnesses not only to the existence of this God but also to the nature of God and of the Christian faith. The gathering is also therefore prophetic bearing witness to both the need for community and to being a particular kind of community. That particularity lies in the diversity of the members. They come together not because of like-mindedness, shared interests or similarity but because they are members of that Trinitarian community which is God. Volf goes on, “it is decisive that one understand and live the *relationships within* a given local church in correspondence to the Trinity.” (original emphasis)<sup>286</sup> The local church is called into being as the foundational expression on earth of this ontological reality.

The argument of this study is that, because the local church is where ‘ordinary’ Christians are, it is therefore the place where ordinary theology is – or should – be done. Of

---

<sup>285</sup> Volf, M. (1998) *op. cit.* p33

<sup>286</sup> Volf, M. (1998) *op. cit.* p203

course, that *is* the case. The study demonstrates that ordinary Christians do a lot of ordinary theology. I suggest however that just as, “Trinitarian faith... means becoming a community” (Volf, see above) so ordinary theology means doing theology together. It needs to be a communal task. This is not to outlaw individual ordinary theology. Individuals will and should engage in making sense of life in the light of their faith on a personal level. The preliminary conclusion (above p87) that ordinary theology tends to be personal if not private has a two way problem. It impoverishes the individual and the church. If human being is about being an individual in community which is underpinned by a social view of the Trinity as a community of persons (*cf.* Genesis 1:27) then the individual and the community need each other. In the light of this I argue that the local church needs to be re-cast as a theological community – a place where theological thinking is consciously, openly and collectively present. I question Thompsett’s assertion that,

Laity have already disappeared from much conventional theology, ecclesiastical history, and even popular biblical imagery”<sup>287</sup>

It is not that they have disappeared but that they have been seen as the consumers of theology rather than producers. In quoting Hendrick Kraemer’s observation that, “the laity have not been ‘*theologically* relevant in the church’s thinking about itself” (original emphasis)<sup>288</sup> she is on firmer ground. Ordinary theology is the means of recovering (or discovering) the relevance of the theological thinking and practice of the laity. Re-imagining the local church as a community of ordinary theologians in one sense adds another function to the *instrumental* side of the binary pairing used in analysing the data. It is more than this however. I referred in the autoethnography to a paradigm shift as a fundamental change of mind – looking at the same thing but seeing it in a different way. Seeing the local church as a community of ordinary theologians is not in the first instance about changing the activities or functions of the local church but about how it is conceptualized.

#### 4.4. Doing theology in a local church

The title of this study is *Doing theology in a local church: An ordinary ecclesiology*. It is not therefore just about ordinary theology, though it does argue that this needs to be understood as something more than just the theology of the non-expert and have a more

---

<sup>287</sup> Thompsett, F.H. (2004) *op. cit.* p3

<sup>288</sup> Thompsett, F.H. (2004) *op. cit.* p3

prominent role in the church. The autoethnography and the literature both draw on other forms or (in Cameron's term) voices of theology. Early in the study I challenge Ammerman's idea of "privileging" the voice of the non-expert. I argued that to do so is simply to replace one dominant voice with another. Suggesting that the local church is the *primary* place to do theology – and therefore giving greater prominence to the voice of ordinary theology – does not preclude the other voices. Rather it raises the question of how they might be integrated into the thinking of the local church.

In Cameron's model the formal voice is that of councils, creeds, theologians and clerics, the work in most cases of experts and trained scholars. A common response in the interviews during the field work was some version of, "I am no theologian" suggesting *theologian* refers to such an expert or a professional and theology is therefore something beyond the life of the 'ordinary' believer<sup>289</sup>. Boeve presents a cogent argument of how theology parted company from its traditional foundations a long time ago<sup>290</sup>. Becoming an academic discipline in universities detached it from the everyday and, he argues, led to the modern usage of the word 'theology' inferring it is something which is studied more than practised. Whether or not Boeve's theory is correct it remains the case that theology is seen by many 'lay' Christians as the domain of the 'professionals' – academics and the clergy.

This detachment or dismissal of theology – it depends on perspective which it is – presents an issue for doing theology in the local church. The rich resources of such theology do need to be available and accessible for the local church. Church and 'academy'<sup>291</sup> need to come back together. How this is done lies beyond the scope of this study (a thesis is not a policy document) but a passing comment is worth making. In the Church of England there has been a significant move in recent years to promote theological thinking through the work of its cathedrals. Canon theologians' roles have evolved from cloistered academics to

---

<sup>289</sup> Interestingly, though Cameron includes clerics and church members know their clergy have been professionally trained, they rarely refer to them as theologians. Equally interesting is that thinking back to my career as an ordained priest I cannot remember ever being asked about my theology in any of the posts I was interviewed for.

<sup>290</sup> Boeve, L. (2003) *op. cit.* pp 37-40

<sup>291</sup> In the *Reflection on Practice* in the portfolio I reflect on the status and health of theology in British universities – an issue of some concern in what Collini describes as, "the instrumental discourse of modern market democracies" which is affecting them. Collini, S. (2012) *What are Universities For?* London: Penguin pp3-4

diocesan educators, a move which suggests a growing appreciation of the need for a theologically articulate and informed church and releasing those who can facilitate it.

This formal voice will filter through to the local church in various ways, most probably through the other voice in Cameron's model, the normative voice. This is made up of scriptures, creeds, official church teaching and liturgies. There is some clearly considerable overlap between this and the formal voice in terms of both content and 'speaker'. That is, the normative voice is also that of the 'professional' – the academic, the cleric or the canon lawyer. I suggest the local church in doing theology needs to pay more attention to this voice. It is however more readily accessible to the Christian in the local church than the formal, academic voice. In so far as it speaks of scriptures, creeds, official church teaching and liturgies I argue it is most clearly recognised in the voice of tradition and denomination. This might be seen as dangerous. Earlier in the study both of these have been seen to be under some pressure in the contemporary context. There has been, according to Boeve<sup>292</sup> a rupturing of tradition in the postmodern context. Denominations, with a strong association with institution, likewise carry negative connotations. Nieman asks if denominations are really theological. For some he says, they are, "large-scale organizations bent on their own survival." Others see them as a, "scandalous residue" of past religious or national empire building. For some they are identified with the worst of institutional bureaucracy and for others they are, "program-driven structures located far from the actual lives of the faithful." He concludes, "[when] denominations are seen in these ways, cynicism about the place of theology in them is the natural result."<sup>293</sup> There are however critical aspects of them both which can resource the local church.

I start with tradition as that naturally sets the scene for denomination. Tradition (*παράδοσιν*) appears very early on in Christianity. In the New Testament the word is used several times, sometimes negatively as in Mark 7:9 when Jesus says, "You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition", sometimes as an autobiographical account as in Paul's statement in Galatians 1:14, "I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions". However, it is also used positively as descriptor of the

---

<sup>292</sup> Boeve, L. (2002) *op. cit.* p37ff

<sup>293</sup> Roozen, D.A. & Nieman, J.R. (Eds) (2005) *op. cit.* p625



gospel as in 2 Thessalonians 3:6 “Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition (παράδοσιν) that you received from us.” The early development of this language indicates tradition is not primarily about the past but about ‘passing on’. By the time Paul is using it in his sense the faith is still new. The importance of tradition in his sense is that Christian faith is authenticated not by the individual’s experience but by the way that experience matches that of the church community across time. To know that there has been a genuine encounter with Christ the Christian needs an external authority drawn from all Christian experience to authenticate it. Boeve argues that,

not only is tradition the precondition which makes the identity, continuity and unfolding of the message of revelation in the faith community possible, but...it also constitutes the precondition for making the faith community itself possible in as far as it makes faith possible.<sup>294</sup>

Crucially, he goes on to say that there is, “no Christian faith or Christian community outside the framework of the Christian tradition.”<sup>295</sup> Faith is received and handed on: it is not invented.

In her critically important study *Religion as a Chain of Memory* Danièle Hervieu-Legér champions the need to recover memory. I identify her use of memory with tradition on the grounds that traditions are embodied (often enacted) memories. Hervieu-Legér describes the postmodern world as an uncertain place and time. She argues that it is characterized by disruption and dislocation and asks if an apparent consequence of secularization is, “the draining of memory and the consequent threat to the survival of religion.”<sup>296</sup> She continues,

This uncertainty shows itself in a particularly acute form in the search for identity to which modern society is ill-suited to respond, lacking as it does the essential resource for identity of a memory held in common.

Society is therefore forced, “continually to reconstruct itself in new forms so as to ensure continuity for both the group and the individual.” Such a reconstruction requires, “an organized and integrated social memory”<sup>297</sup> otherwise it will be fragmentary and

---

<sup>294</sup> Boeve L 2002 *op. cit.* p20

<sup>295</sup> Boeve L 2002 *op. cit.* p20

<sup>296</sup> Hervieu-Legér, D. (2000) *Religion as a Chain of Memory* New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press p141

<sup>297</sup> Hervieu-Legér, D. (2000) *ibid* p142

unsustainable. What she is arguing is for the deliberate or intentional rehabilitation of memory for the individual and the collective. Her longer argument is that memory has fallen prey to progress and has, almost inadvertently, been discarded. There is now a need to, “recover the past in the imagination without which collective identity, just as individual identity, is unable to operate.”<sup>298</sup> In so doing she frames tradition as an anchor rather than a shackle, something which gives stability in uncertainty but still allows movement. As one of the interviewees for this study said, “*tradition is not about things not changing*”. The Benedictine vows of *Stability* and *Conversatio morum* capture something of this paradox: to be stable is not to be static but ever changing.

In linking her idea of memory and its purpose to tradition I suggest there is a need to reframe tradition as a reservoir of empowering memories. Reservoirs have inflow and outflow, otherwise they become stagnant. In storing water they locate it in a particular place and thereby make the outflow more usable and powerful. This model sees memories as a stored resource located in a particular place to be drawn on, to empower and to inform. The significant part of Hervieu-Legér’s argument for this study however is the way she makes the case for the collective memory. She highlights interest in France for example, mirrored here also in the UK, in genealogies and family histories as a means of tapping into resources of memory in the quest for identity. This matters to communities as well as individuals. But it raises the question of where that reservoir of memories is located.

Before I turn to that question it is important to draw attention to the significance of memory in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. This lies in the frequent biblical injunction to “remember” which pervades both Old and New Testaments (e.g. 1 Chron. 16:15; Deut. 8:18; 2 Tim. 2:8; Heb. 10:32)<sup>299</sup>. To remember is to do more than recall. It is to make something present in such a way that it has power or life. The prayer of the Psalmist asking God not to remember his sins (Psalm 25:7) is not a plea that God forget but that he gives no power or life to those sins. The command of Jesus at the Last Supper to, “do this in remembrance of me,” (Luke 22:19) is not about reminiscence or nostalgia but a means of making the past a present reality. The normative voice of theology I suggest is carried in this kind of

---

<sup>298</sup> Hervieu-Legér, D. (2000) *ibid* p141

<sup>299</sup> Memory matters more in oral cultures which the worlds of the Old and New Testament predominantly were. Paradoxically most contemporary technological societies can store vast quantities of material but remember less.

remembering, in paying attention to tradition understood in this way. Hervieu-Legér's observations about memory (and therefore tradition) lead into examining where that voice is located and how it is accessed by those in the local church. This I suggest is where denominations have an important part to play.

Hervieu-Legér's argument makes the connection. "If one can describe societies of the past as societies of memory it is precisely because in them memory was compact and present in every part of life; they had no need to call it up."<sup>300</sup> Instead of focusing on denominations as institutions "bent on their own survival" (Nemian – see above p97) they are better viewed as 'societies of memory'. In the following discussion I focus on Anglicanism, not out of partisan loyalty but because this study is set in an Anglican congregation. I suggest any denomination can profitably look to its past to find theological resources which can enrich its contemporary life. Thompsett writes with, "a sense of respectful urgency."

If we fail to remember what formative Anglican theologians prized most of all, if we forget the special hallmarks of our own denomination, then our theology will be rootless, increasingly susceptible to mimicking only contemporary secular passions, tossed to and fro from one generation to another without regard for past wisdom or future challenges.<sup>301</sup>

A key aspect of Anglicanism is liturgical worship. The normative voice of theology is carried in that liturgy. The theological thinking (in some cases battles) which devising liturgy has entailed means it carries carefully worked theological truths considered key to the faith. The inclusion in liturgy of substantial portions of scripture, the prescribed reading of scripture and the reciting of the creeds exposes worshippers to theological ideas on a regular basis. It is not that the simple repetition of such material is of benefit (though psychologists might have a view on that) but that it creates a frame of reference in which ordinary theology takes place. The dialogue which takes place between this form of theology and the individual's personal experience and thinking allows each to inform the other. Significantly, liturgy in this sense is a shared experience, paying attention to the common beliefs of the congregation. Individuals are not thereby forced to believe the same things but share together what they understand by those common statements. Dunston church's practice of

---

<sup>300</sup> Hervieu-Legér, D. (2000) *ibid* p141

<sup>301</sup> Thompsett, F.H. (2004) *ibid* p61

adding an explanatory commentary to the liturgy on an occasional basis encourages attention to this.

Doing theology in the local church is the work of the whole church and it must draw on all the resources of the church. As Astley and others have rightly identified there needs to be dialogue between the various sources or voices. Ordinary theology in this study can be seen to include those other voices. They do however need to be strengthened. Hervieu-Légér's pathology of the fate of memory is instructive. Her suggestion that memory has been an unintentional victim of modernism applies equally to theology. In the church the drive to make it more attractive, accessible or relevant runs the risk of cutting it adrift from the resources of its collective memory.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1. Conclusion

The conclusion of study is that ordinary theology does go on in the local church. There are however three aspects of it which need addressing. First it tends to be personal if not private. That is, those who engage in theological reflection (this appears to be most in the congregation though few would call it this) have limited opportunities (or choose not to) to share it. There *are* occasions when they are able to do so: occasional groups such as Lent courses or bible study groups but on the whole it appears to remain personal and therefore private. It follows from this, secondly, that it is also largely unacknowledged. It has nowhere to go other than the individual's own experience or a limited circle of close acquaintances. Thirdly, the theological resources accessed by ordinary church members to help with theological reflection are limited.

In the light of this ordinary theology in the local church needs to be re-framed as the primary source of theology. The local church, re-imagined as a theological community, needs to be a place where its members are encouraged and resourced to reflect theologically in order to equip them for the apologetic task of mission to which they are called in their locality.

This reverses the current model of church as a kind of 'end user' institution and concludes that it should in fact be seen (as much of the current literature argues) as the primary expression of church and the primary *locus* of theological thinking.

### 5.2. Reflections on the project

*Roads go on  
While we forget, and are  
Forgotten like a star  
That shoots and is gone.*

(from *Roads* by Edward Thomas)

Church has of course continued since the project ended. I continue to belong to Dunston church and since the ending of the fieldwork have been able to play a different role in the congregation. I am still more of a lay person than clergy but have done more leading of worship and preaching than I did during the project. The pulpit and other group contexts

have provided opportunities to reflect with the congregation on ecclesiology (as well as other topics – I have tried to avoid being a single issue preacher!).

Reflecting on the project itself and how I went about it I have made much more use of autoethnography in a variety of contexts. As I argued in the portfolio, it is equally powerful as a research and pastoral tool. In a 'theology discussion group' (the name is cumbersome but after lengthy ponderings we could come up with nothing other than something randomly esoteric!) I have used my autoethnography and encouraged others to write theirs (or record them – some are more comfortable with digital recording than writing). Each has yielded rich resources. By focusing the narrative on a particular doctrine or aspect of church considerable theological reflection is generated. Not only does it involve engagement with the story: it also encourages the pursuit of tools to interpret the story. Rather than simply recounting the narrative members have gone in search of books, people and other resources to help them tell and understand their story. Given the time over again I would have used autoethnography instead of interviews to gather data.

The project has also resulted in a greater awareness of the need to address the collective. Explorations of new monasticism as a movement is proving to be a thought provoking possibility. Dispersed communities such as *The Northumbria Community* are one model but there are local churches exploring the ideas of congregational 'rules of life'<sup>302</sup>. *Fresh Expressions* of church are prominent in this development. These bring both the idea of church as community and the theological thinking of church members to the fore. They are calls to consider what community is (and how it is) in contemporary society along with encouragement to think, read, reflect and pray. IT may be in the not too distant future that Dunston church explores this as a possibility.

The diocese has also introduced important initiatives. Much more prominence is being given to deaneries as mechanisms of resource rather than administrative systems. Included in this is the obvious sharing of financial and personnel resources but equipping the church for mission and ministry involves theological thinking on the part of the churches as well.

---

<sup>302</sup> St. Mary's Church, Marlborough is one example. The Northumbria Community's *Encounters on the Edge 43: Seven Sacred Spaces - Expressing community life in Christ* by George Lings is another.

## Bibliography

- Ammerman, N.T. (2007) *Everyday Religion* Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Anderson, R.S. (2001) *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press
- Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas (1985) *Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation* London: Church House Publishing
- Archer, M.S. (2007) *Making Our Way through the World* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Arygris, C. and Schön, D.A. (1978) *Organizational learning: A theory of action perspective* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company
- Astley J (2002) *Ordinary Theology* Aldershot: Ashgate
- Astley, J. (2004) *Exploring God-talk* London: Darton, Longman and Todd
- Astley, J. & Francis, L. (2013) *Exploring Ordinary Theology* Aldershot: Ashgate
- Atkinson, P., Coffey, A., Delamint, S., Lofland, J. and Lofland, L. (2007) *Handbook of Ethnography* London: SAGE Publications
- Avis, P. (1989) in *Eros and the Sacred* London: SPCK
- Avis, P. (2002) *Anglicanism and the Christian Church* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edn) London: T&T Clark
- Avis, P. (2003) (Ed) *Public Faith* London: SPCK
- Avis, P. (2007) *The Identity of Anglicanism: Essentials of Anglican Ecclesiology* London: Continuum
- Barth, K. (1964) *God Here and Now* trans. Paul M. van Buren London: Routledge and Kegan Paul
- Bauman, Z. (2001) *The Individualized Society* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Bauman, Z. (2005) *Liquid Life* Cambridge: Polity Press
- Beck, U. & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002) *Individualisation* London: Sage
- Bellah, R.N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W.M., Swidler, A. and Tipton, S.M. (2007) *Habits of the Heart* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition) Berkeley, California: University of California Press
- Boeve, L. (2002) *Interrupting Tradition* Leuven: Peeters Press

- Boeve, L. (2006) Recontextualizing the Christian Narrative in a Postmodern Context in *The Journal of Philosophy and Scripture* Vol. 3 Issue 2 2006
- Boeve, L. (2007) *God Interrupts History* New York: Continuum
- Boff, L. (1986) *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books
- Bondi, L., Carr, D., Clark, C. & Clegg, C. (2011) *Towards Professional Wisdom: Practical Deliberation in the People Professions* Farnham: Ashgate Publishing
- Bonhoeffer, D. (1937) *The Cost of Discipleship* (2001 Edition: Fourth impression 2006) London: SCM
- Braaten, C.E. (1998) *Mother Church: Ecclesiology and Ecumenism* Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Fortress Press
- Brierley, M. (Ed) (2006) *Public Life and the Place of the Church: Reflections to Honour the Bishop of Oxford* Aldershot: Ashgate
- Brown, C. (2006) *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* London: Longman
- Brown, C. (2007) *Secularization, the growth of militancy and the spiritual revolution: religious change and gender power in Britain, 1901–2001* in Historical Research Volume 80 Issue 209 August 2007
- Brown, C. (2009) *The Death of Christian Britain* London: Routledge
- Browning, D. (1996) (New Edition) *A Fundamental Practical Theology* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress
- Bruce, S. (2002) *God Is Dead: Secularization in the West*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Bruner, J. (1990) *Acts of Meaning* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Cameron, H., Bhatti, D., Duce, C., Sweeney, J. and Watkins, C. (2010) *Talking About God* London: SCM
- Carpenter, H. (1996) *Robert Runcie: The Reluctant Archbishop* London: Hodder & Stoughton
- Cartledge, M. (2010) *Testimony in the Spirit: Rescripting Ordinary Pentecostal Theology* Aldershot: Ashgate
- Chang, H. (2008) *Autoethnography as method* Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press Inc
- Chang, H. and Boyd, D. (Eds) (2011) *Spiritualities in Higher Education: Autoethnographies* Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press Inc



- Chartres, C. (2006) *Why I am Still an Anglican* London: Continuum
- Christie, A.(2012) *Ordinary Christology: Who do you say I am? Answers from the pews* Farnham: Ashgate
- Clandinin, D.J. *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications
- Clark, D.B., (2005) *Breaking the Mould of Christendom* Peterborough: Epworth Press
- Cole, N. (2005) *Organic Church* San Francisco CA: Jossey-Bass
- Collini, S. (2012) *What are Universities For?* London: Penguin
- Cray, G. (Ed) (2004) *Mission Shaped Church* London: Church House Publishing
- Crockford's *Clerical Directory* (1987) London: Church House Publishing
- Day, A. (2011) *Believing in Belonging* Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Davie, G. (1994) *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing without Belonging* Oxford: Blackwell
- Davie, G. (2000) *Religion in Modern Europe: A memory mutates* Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Davis, K. and Evans, M. (2016) *Transatlantic Conversations* Abingdon: Routledge
- Davison, A. 2011 *Imaginative Apologetics* London: SCM
- Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) (2005) *The Handbook of Qualitative Research (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)* Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage
- Dormor, D., McDonald, J. & Caddick, J. ( 2003) *Anglicanism: The Answer to Postmodernity* London: Continuum
- Douglas, I.T. (2004) *Anglicans Gathering for God's Mission: A Missiological Ecclesiology for the Anglican Communion* Journal of Anglican Studies, Volume 2, Issue 02, October 2004
- Dulles, A. (1974) *Models of the Church* New York: Doubleday
- Egan, G. (2014) *The Skilled Helper (10<sup>th</sup> Edition)* Belmont, CA.: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company
- Etherington, K. (2004) *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher: using our selves in research* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

- Francis, L. J., & Richter, P. (2007). *Gone for good? Church-leaving and returning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Peterborough: Epworth Press
- Fish, S. (1980) *Is There a Text in this Class?* Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press
- Ford, D.F., & Pecknold, C.C. (2006) *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning* Oxford: Blackwell
- Ford, D.F. (2007) *God and Our Public Life: A Scriptural Wisdom* in International Journal of Public Theology Volume 1: Number 1 (2007)
- Forrester, D.B. (1990) *Theology and Practice* London: Epworth Press
- Ganzevoort, R.R. presidential address to the ninth conference, International Academy of Practical Theology Chicago 2009 [www.ia-pt.org](http://www.ia-pt.org)
- Garcia, A.L. & Wood, S.K. (Eds) (2011) *Critical Issue sin Ecclesiology Essays in Honor of Carl E. Braaten* Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing
- Garnett, J., Grimley, M., Harris, A., Whyte, W and Williams, S. (2006) *Redefining Christian Britain: Post 1945 Perspectives* London: SCM Press
- Gibbs, E. & Bolger, R.K. (2006) *Emerging Churches* London: SPCK
- Giddens, A. (1984), *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* Cambridge: Polity Press
- Glaser, B.G., & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Goodhew, D. (Ed) (2012) *Church Growth in Britain, 1980 to the Present* Farnham: Ashgate
- Graham, E., Walton, H. and Ward, F. (2005) *Theological Reflection: Methods* London: SCM
- Graham, E. (2013) *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* London: SCM
- Guest, M., Tustig, K. and Woodhead, L. (2004) *Congregational Studies in the UK* Aldershot: Ashgate
- Gunton, C. (1997) (Ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Hardy, D.W. (2001) *Finding the Church* London: SCM
- Hauerwas, S. (1981) *A Community of Character* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press

- Hauerwas, S. and Willimon, W. (1989) *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* Nashville: Abingdon Press
- Hauerwas, S. (1995) *In Good Company: Church as Polis* Notre Dame IN: Notre Dame Press
- Healey, N. (2000) *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Heelas, P (1998) (Ed) *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity* Oxford: Blackwell
- Heelas, P. and Woodhead, L. (2005) *The Spiritual Revolution* Oxford: Blackwell
- Hegstad, H. (2013) *The Real Church: An Ecclesiology of the Visible* Cambridge: James Clarke & Co
- Heitink, G. (1999) *Practical Theology* Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans
- Helm, J. (Ed) (1967) *Essays on the Verbal and the Visual Arts: Proceedings of the 1966 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society* Seattle: University of Washington Press
- Hervieu-Légér, D. (2000) *Religion as a Chain of Memory* New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press
- Holloway R (2012) *Leaving Alexandria: A Memoir of Faith and Doubt* Edinburgh: Canongate
- Hopewell, J.F. (1987) *Congregation: Stories and Structures* Philadelphia: Fortress Press
- Jamieson, A. (2002) *A Churchless Faith: Faith Journeys Beyond the Churches* London: SPCK
- Jenkins, D. (2002) *The Calling of Cuckoo* London: Continuum
- Jenkins, P. (2007) *The Next Christendom* Oxford: OUP
- Jenkins, M. (1999) *The Church Faces Death: Ecclesiology in a Post-Modern Context* Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Jones, B.F. & Green, G.L. (2015) *Faithful* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing
- Judt, T. (2007) *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* London: Pimlico
- Judt, T. (2010) *Ill Fares the Land* London: Penguin
- Keenan, B. (1992) *An Evil Cradling* London: Vintage
- Kim, S.C.H., Kollontai, P. and Hoyland, G. (2008) *Peace and Reconciliation: In Search of Shared Identity* Aldershot: Ashgate

- Knott, K. (2005) *The Location of Religion* London: Equinox
- Lewis, C.S. (1955) *The Magician's Nephew* Lions (1980 edition)
- Luckmann, T. (1967) *The Invisible Religion* New York: MacMillan
- Mannion, G. & Mudge, L.S. (Eds) (2008) *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church* Abingdon: Routledge
- Martin, D. (1997) *Reflections on Sociology and Theology* Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Marwick, A. (1999 edition) *The Sixties* Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks
- May, T. (2002) *Qualitative Research in Action* London: Sage Publications
- McFadyen, A.I. (1990) *The Call to Personhood* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- McIlveen, P. (2008) Autoethnography as a method for reflexive research and practice in vocational psychology. *Australian Journal of Career Development* 17(2)
- Miller, D.E. (1997) *Reinventing American Protestantism* Berkeley: University of California Press
- Moltmann, J. (1977) *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* Minneapolis: Fortress Press
- Moustakas C (1990) *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications* London: Sage
- Naphy, W.G. (2007) *The Protestant Revolution* London: BBC Books
- Neuman, N.W. (1991) *Social Science Research Methods* Needham Heights, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon
- Newbigin, L. (2008 edition) *The Household of God* Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers
- Niebuhr, H.R., (2001 edition) *Christ and Culture* New York: Harper Collins
- Orsi, R. (2010) *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition) Yale: Yale University Press
- Osmer, R.R. (2008) *Practical Theology: An Introduction* Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans
- Patton, M.Q. (2010) *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Percy, M. (2005) *Engaging with Contemporary Culture* Aldershot: Ashgate

- Percy, M.(2013) *Anglicanism: Confidence, Commitment and Community* Farnham: Ashgate
- Perks, R. and Thomson, A. (Eds) (1998) *The Oral History Reader* London: Routledge
- Podmore, C. (2005) *Aspects of Anglican Identity* London: Church House Publishing
- Putnam, R.D. (2000) *Bowling Alone* New York: Simon & Shuster
- Ramsey, A.M. (1965) *Sacred and Secular* London: Longman's, Green and Co Ltd
- Ramsey, A.M. (1969) *God, Christ and the World* London: SCM
- Robinson, J. (1963) *Honest to God* London: SCM
- Rogers, C. (1990) *Client Centred Therapy* Pacific Grove, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company
- Roozen, D.A. & Nieman, J.R. (Eds) (2005) *Church, Identity and Change* Cambridge: Eerdmans
- Russell, C., Hogan, L. and Junker-Kenny, M. (2012) *Ethics for Graduate Researchers: a cross-disciplinary approach* London: Elsevier
- Schensul, S., Schensul, J. and LeCompte, M. (1999) *Essential ethnographic methods: Observations, interviews, and questionnaires* London: Altamira Press
- Schillebeeckx, E. (1990) *Church: The Human Story of God* London: SCM
- Schreiter, R.J. (1985) *Constructing Local Theologies* Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books
- Silverman, D (Ed) (2011) *Qualitative Research* London: SAGE Publications
- Silverman, D. (2014) *Interpreting Qualitative Data (Fourth Edition)* London: SAGE Publications
- Soja, E.W. (1996) *Thirdspace*. Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing
- Steinbeck, J. (2006) Edition) *The Grapes of Wrath* London: Penguin
- Stoker, G. (2007) *New Localism, Participation and Networked Community Governance* University of Manchester, UK/Institute for Political and Economic Governance
- Stringer, M.D. (1999) *ON the Perception of Worship* Birmingham: Birmingham University Press
- Swinton, J. and Mowat, H. (2006) *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* London: SCM
- Sykes, S., Booty, J. and Knight, J. (1998) *The Study of Anglicanism* London: SPCK

- Tacey, D. (2004) *The Spirituality Revolution* London: Routledge
- Thompson, P. (2000) *The Voice of the Past (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition)* Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Thompsett, F.H. (2004) *We are Theologians* New York: Seabury Books
- Todd, A.J. (2009) (unpublished PhD thesis Cardiff University) *The talk, dynamics and theological practice of Bible-study groups: A qualitative empirical investigation*
- Towler, R. & Coxon, A.P.M. (1979) *The Fate of the Anglican Clergy* London: The Macmillan Press
- van der Ven, J.A.(1996) *Ecclesiology in Context* Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing
- Vanstone, W.H. (1977) *Love's Endeavour Love's Expense* London: Darton, Longman and Todd
- Veling TA (2005) *Practical Theology "On Earth as it is in Heaven"* Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books
- Village, A. (2007) *The Bible and Lay People: An Empirical Approach to Ordinary Hermeneutics* Aldershot: Ashgate
- Volf, M. (1998) *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing
- Volf, M. and Bass, D.C. (Eds) (2002) *Practicing Theology* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B Eerdmans & Co
- von Hügel, F. (1908, revised 1923). *The Mystical Element of Religion: as studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and her friends*, 2 vols
- Ward, K. (2006) *A History of Global Anglicanism* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Ward, P. ( 2002) *Liquid Church* Carlisle: Paternoster Press
- Ward, P. (Ed) (2012) *Perspectives on ecclesiology and ethnography* Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans
- White, V. (2002) *Identity* London: SCM Press
- Williams, R. (2000) *Lost Icons* London: T&T Clark
- Williams, R. (2000) *On Christian Theology* Oxford: Blackwell
- Williams, R. (2004) *Religious Identities* London: Darton, Longman and Todd
- Wilson, B. (1982) *Religion in Sociological Perspective* Oxford: Oxford University Press

Woodward, J. & Pattison, S. (Eds) (2000) *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* Oxford: Blackwell

Zizioulas, J.D. (2001) *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop During the First Three Centuries* Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press

#### Articles and websites

Brock, A. *Dimensions of early years professionalism – attitudes versus competences?*  
<http://www.tactyc.org.uk/pdfs/Reflection-brock.pdf> viewed 24.11.14

Kitzinger, J. Introducing focus groups *BMJ* Volume 311 29<sup>th</sup> July 1995 pp299-302  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2550365/> viewed on line 18.09.16

Labov W. & Waletzky, J. Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience in Helm, J. (Ed) (1967) *Essays on the Verbal and the Visual Arts: Proceedings of the 1966 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society* Seattle: University of Washington Press pp12-44

Mason, M. *Impossible Ecclesiology? John D. Caputo and the Emerging Church (Movement?)*  
Unpublished lecture Ecclesiological Investigations Network 2007 <http://ei-research.net/> viewed 15.09.16

Olive, J.L. (2014) Reflecting on the Tensions Between Emic and Etic Perspectives in Life History Research: Lessons Learned. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 15(2), Art. 6, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs140268> viewed 21.10.16.

Rooms, N.J. English and Christian? Negotiating Christian Cultural Identity Through Imaginative Theological Pedagogy in *Practical Theology* vol 3; issue 1 2010 pp69-80

*Theological Librarianship: An Online Journal of the American Theological Library Association*  
Volume 4, Number 1